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AN ANALYSIS OF 1 SAMUEL 9-31:
IS SAUL A TRAGIC HERO?

by
Rosemary Reedy

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Thank you and God bless you all.

VITA

The author, Rosemary Reedy, is the daughter of John E. Reedy and Marie (Tilger) Reedy. She was born November 26, 1952, in Wrightstown, Wisconsin.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
VITA	iii
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Notes	4
II. TOWARD A DEFINITION OF GREEK TRAGEDY	5
Notes	24
III. AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT 1 SAMUEL 9-31	26
Notes	89
IV. THE SAUL NARRATIVE AND GREEK TRAGEDY: POINTS OF CONTACT AND DEPARTURE	96
Notes	112
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	113

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Saul narrative has frequently been categorized as a tragedy. Von Rad notes of the Saul narrative that "Israel never again gave birth to a poetic production which in certain of its features has such close affinity with the spirit of Greek tragedy."¹ David Gunn devotes an entire book to the discussion of The Fate of King Saul, viewing the narrative as a tragedy of fate. The "tragedy" label has been linked to the Saul narrative by many scholars: Mary Ellen Chase, W. Lee Humphreys, Leland Ryken, J.C.L. Gibson, Eric Rust, Hertzberg, and others.² Some have made it a direct application, as in two of Humphrey's articles entitled, "The Tragedy of King Saul: A Study of the Structure of 1 Samuel 9-31," and "From Tragic Hero to Villain: A Study of the Figure of Saul and the Development of 1 Samuel". Others, like Hertzberg, have applied the term less emphatically, as they consider the "fate of Saul" or the "tragedy surrounding the death of Saul". The Saul narrative has called the attention of biblical scholars, students of the Bible, and the average lay audience to recognize its "affinity" to Greek tragedy. It is the purpose of this thesis to consider the Saul narrative as presented in 1 Samuel 9-31 in relation to Greek tragedy, to see if the label of tragedy actually is appropriate. By establishing a

definition of Greek tragedy and applying that definition to a close analysis of the biblical text, this study endeavors to determine whether Saul fulfills the qualifications of a Greek tragic hero. It is not my intent to develop an iron clad definition of Greek tragedy, a feat deemed impossible by those who are experts on the matter. Yet, to consider tragedy as nebulous as an aura, feeling or sense is to greatly demean the literary structure of tragedy. Similarly, I feel that some biblical studies have treated the issue of tragedy rather superficially, and applied the term to the Saul narrative without showing sufficient justification. Furthermore, many have failed to consider the theological implications of the Saul narrative as either a biblical tragedy of fate, or as a biblical tragedy of flaw.

This study does not propose to have resolved every problem, or answered every question in regard to biblical tragedy. It does attempt, though, to bring the worlds of literary and biblical scholarship together in a mutual quest for further understanding of the literary and theological considerations which are essential if one is to view Saul as a tragic hero.

The obvious difference in genre between Greek dramatic tragedy and a prose Saul narrative is not at issue. Rather of concern will be the role of the Athenian community, the hero, and the gods in comparison to the Israelite community, Saul, and Yahweh. Significant characters such as Samuel, David and Jonathan

will be considered as they relate, reveal, and influence the character of Saul. The primary concern of this study is the consideration of whether Saul is a tragic hero in the Greek sense. The affinities to Greek tragedy will be noted, but only as they reflect on the character of Saul. The text analysis of chapter III will indicate points of contact and contrast with Greek tragedy. Chapter IV will synthesize and evaluate the information in order to draw a conclusion of whether Saul should be perceived as a tragic hero, whether he should take his place at center stage as did Oedipus, Heracles and Ajax. If the play's the thing in which Hamlet captures the conscience of the king, perhaps by viewing the biblical text as a play one may capture the conscience of the community as it regarded Saul, their first king.

Notes

¹Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. 1 (Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 325.

²Mary Ellen Chase, The Bible and the Common Reader, (rev. ed.; NY: Macmillian Co., 1952), p. 122; W. Lee Humphrey's, "The Tragedy of King Saul: A Study of the Structure of 1 Samuel 9-31," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Vol. 6, 1978, pp. 18-27; Leland Ryken, The Literature of the Bible, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1974), pp. 94-7; J.C.L. Gibson, "Biblical Tragedy," The Reformed World, Vol. 36, no. 7, 1981, pp. 291; Eric Rust, The Layman's Bible Commentary, Vol. 6 (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), p. 95; Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, I & II Samuel: A Commentary, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 231.

CHAPTER II

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF GREEK TRAGEDY

Aristotle's Poetics provides the classic standards for Greek tragedy. Briefly summarized they call for a hero who is a man of action, honor, and renown whose downfall is the result of the gods acting in the world as well as the hero's own actions. His suffering often brings the hero to a greater self-knowledge and a glimpse of sublime knowledge. The process of unfolding the tragic hero's story was to produce in the audience a katharsis, a purgation of the emotions, especially those of pity and fear.¹

Greek tragedy was to be "an imitation of an action of certain magnitude,"² and, in a sense, therefore a story-telling. Material for these stories was drawn from legends and myths which related a loose history of Greece from her beginnings to the Dorian conquest. The general outlines were clear, yet the authors were free to vary the details considerably. The "givens" of Oedipus include that he was king of Thebes, that he solved the Sphinx's riddle and thus defeated that danger for Thebes, that he killed his father and married his mother, that he discovered the truth of his actions, and that he quarreled with his sons. The story-teller can devise his own variants of how Oedipus came to be ignorant of his own hideous deeds and how he comes to know the truth. Greek tragedy was story-telling, but always a story of seriousness and magnitude.

The heroes were men of great stature, both physically and socially. High heel boots, Cothurni, were worn to elevate the hero physically; socially, the heroes were often kings or warrior-leaders. The hero's high status and stature served to deepen the significance of his change of fortune.

The heroes were large and intense human beings, yet they were not perfect beings. They had their faults, and whether the fault was arrogance, pride, acting in ignorance, or something else, the fault was not so overwhelmingly evil so as to make the hero morally depraved. Rather, the hero, as Aristotle described him, was to be a man like ourselves, though of greater stature. Whatever his imperfection, fault, or character traits, it was viewed as inseparable from whatever virtue, strength, or natural ability had enabled him to become a hero in the first place.³ The audience could identify with and be moved to feel for a hero like themselves. The hero who had displayed his extraordinary powers and prowess, who had opened the door to new human possibilities, this hero was also a man of human frailty and limitations. He was after all only a man.

To Aristotle, hamartia was not a tragic flaw as in the tragedy of Shakespeare, nor was it a moral shortcoming in the sense of sin. Scholars contend that hamartia referred either to an offense committed in ignorance or to a misidentification of the person himself or his character. In any case, hamartia was something within the tragic hero that contributed to his own downfall. A truth was hidden in ignorance or mistaken identity, and this truth must be

salvaged. Consequently, the hero must fail in the recognition of this truth.

The hero's downfall indeed did result in part from the hero's own actions, but it also came from the gods. Greek tragedies operated in a world where suffering and pain, destiny and fate, were exacted by a pantheon of gods who asserted themselves in the lives of men. These gods did not hold themselves responsible for the eternal laws, nor did they share in man's suffering in order to redeem it.⁴ The supernatural powers fought among themselves, had human favorites, demanded respect, prayer and sacrifice. Aeschylus attempted to justify the hero's suffering by making divine justice coincide with human concepts of justice, thus yielding a "deserved" suffering. Euripides, at the other extreme, declared that gods who do evil are no gods. Sophocles held the middle ground, acknowledging the divine power and prerogative, but allowing a separate, unknown standard for divine justice. For Sophocles, man is responsible for his moral choices, even if done in ignorance. Oedipus in Oedipus Rex admits himself to be "vile" and tainted for his sins committed in ignorance. In Oedipus at Colonus he queries, "In nature how was I evil?" This is not a denial of moral guilt; rather it is a clarification⁵ of fate consummated through a character's own being and action which in themselves are not evil.

The god Dionysus, to whom the dramatic arts were dedicated, required more than prayer and sacrifice; he demanded "the whole of

man".⁶ Dionysus ravished man, made man quiver in fear, lifted man in ecstasy above worldly cares. Dionysus engaged all the passionate and creative potencies of man in order to transform man. This transformation is also fundamental to the process of dramatic art.⁷ Since the dramatic arts find their roots in the ritual worship of Dionysus, it is no surprise that Greek tragedy would perceive the transformation of the tragic hero as the product of the actions of both man and the gods.

Thus, in tragedy, the gods could punish man, whether or not he deserved to suffer. The justice of the gods was conceived as on a different plane than that of human justice. For Aeschylus this suffering brought wisdom and thus justified the divine order. This knowledge, this transformation, could give man greater self-knowledge and a realization of the human condition in relation to the gods. Not all Greek dramatists shared Aeschylus' view of the gods in terms of the guilt-retribution-suffering-wisdom cycle, but they do consistently present the gods as the dealers of man's fate.

In his fated and to some degree self-imposed downfall, the hero suffers a drastic change of fortune. The brave are found cowardly; the honorable are dishonored; the righteous bear guilt. It is the particularly painful agony of a sufferer who recognizes in the moment of truth the "shape of the action"⁸ in which he is involved. He suffers knowingly, knowing it is from the gods, knowing he contributed to and shares responsibility for his own downfall, knowing it cannot be averted. Even in Aristotle's sense of "un-

deserved suffering", the hero's error may be simple ignorance which exacts as well its price. Ancient Greece had a type of guilt in which no one was subjectively responsible for a very real, objective horror, a horror that might affect an entire country as in a plague. Yet the guilt was real and reflected a failure of human insight and understanding of justice in adverse situations.⁹ Such a guilt would explain that Oedipus was tainted and "vile", yet "in nature" not evil. Even in Aeschylus, who does present heroes as morally culpable and guilty, the reversal of good fortune for the tragic hero was a conscious and public activity. The hero's fortune served as a warning to all others who might deem themselves above the divine decrees.

The hero's suffering might, but did not always, lead to a further knowledge and betterment of the character. For Aeschylus, the wisdom through suffering theme gave meaning, at least in part, to human life and suffering. For Sophocles and Euripides the notion of the tragic hero somehow transcending the human realm is less likely. For them divine knowledge is hopelessly beyond man, hidden and secret. The betterment of the hero comes in the recognition and acceptance of human limitation and frailty. The tragic hero is one who has broadened the horizon of human possibilities by being a man who lives to the full the person he is. In Greek culture what a man inherited through his ancestors was believed to determine the sum total of one's character once and for all. A man's physis, his natural bent, was a permanent possession. For example, Oedipus

is a seeker of truth and cannot halt the quest for truth even when it is evident that it means his own destruction. To cease his search for truth would be to belie the person that he is. As another example, Ajax was a warrior of honor in the line of Homeric heroes who identified his own intrinsic worth in accord to his outward recognition.¹⁰ As a warrior of honor, he was obliged either to retrieve his honor by killing those who fouled it, or to "nobly die". A tragic hero suffers most in living out the full consequences of being the person he is.

The katharsis of pity and fear work best as a matter of cause and effect. Pity is aroused by undeserved suffering, and fear follows, for if a great man can be brought low, how much more should the ordinary man fear for his own destiny. It is important to note that not all human life was viewed as even subject to tragedy. Only people of greatness could suffer greatly. Furthermore, the katharsis was not intended to be a painful wallowing in the excesses of the hero's emotions, but a pleasurable release from them. It was a pity and fear acknowledging human limitations, yet enlightened by the tragic hero's response.

Considering the implications of this description of tragedy from Aristotle, one can draw further characteristics of Greek tragedy. The serious tone and magnitude of tragedy distinguish it from the story-telling of fairy-tales. Furthermore, fairy-tales have nothing happen which is out of character. Perhaps this is because they have no characters, only stereotypes.¹¹ In tragedy

characters feel, move, and choose with motivation and morality implicitly a part of the character. Tragedy deals in the reality of being human, not in a fantasy to escape being human. The audience is not merely amused; they are emotionally engaged to feel pity and fear.

A Greek tragedy was somehow "more pure" than actual events.¹² The stories are permeated with a sense of inevitability, of necessity, of fate. The chain of events of real life rarely appear so stark and irrevocable as the decisions of tragedy. For all its simplicity and directness of action, tragedy is usually a complex web of motivations and moral propositions, with no single interpretation accounting for the totality of the drama. Whereas in reality one would rarely draw judgments on people when the information is confusing and incomplete, the audience of a Greek tragedy was compelled to come to a judgment about the tragic situation and the tragic hero. Like the Greek tragic hero who is subject to wild outbursts of emotion and later cool rational reflection to explain, expound, and articulate his decisions, so too, must the audience feel the emotions and then coolly rationalize and judge the characters and situation.

Not all Greek tragedies end with insolvable conflicts. Being of serious tone did not exclude happy endings. To be serious necessitated the suffering of the hero, but the gods could intervene and rescue the hero. Reconciliations of gods and man are employed by Aeschylus in Oresteia and in the Prometheus trilogy, by

Sophocles in Electra, Philoctetes and Oedipus at Colonus, and by Euripides in Helen and Ion. These reconciliation dramas are still tragedies in their motifs and seriousness of tone. There is the irony that the gods who originally sent suffering can be swayed to intervene and bring peace and tranquility. The gods, like the audience, react to the suffering and might judge that the hero has suffered enough and rescind the earlier decree.

But Greek tragedy was always tied to values; to sever it from values would be to resign the suffering to meaninglessness and despair. Even in the Attic suicides a value mitigates the self-slaughter. Ajax dies to retrieve lost honor; Antigone dies to honor the dead. Jocasta's wild and frenzied suicide serves to illuminate the lack of values in her life. Her religion had been one of convenience, praying only when all else had failed. Her affection for Oedipus was selfish and blind to the resemblance he bore to her late husband. She chastised the gods as inconsistent and ran to her death with no lament or tenderness expressed for her children. She was a bad widow to Laius, and her death cannot retrieve the honor she had lost long ago. She is no heroine, but rather a counterpart to values represented by Oedipus. Oedipus who insisted on finding the truth despite her pleas to stop; Oedipus who rejects suicide fearing he could not face his father or mother in death; Oedipus who accepts the burden of justice in blinding himself and leaving his beloved children and homeland. Oedipus stands for the value of accepting the burden of consequences inherent

in the will of the gods. So long as tragedy is viewed as purporting values, reflecting a divine order or moral example, there will be no question of the meaningfulness of Greek tragedy.

Related to this is the function of tragedy as teacher.

Aristophanes' Frogs suggests that tragedy serves as pedagogy. A contest could evaluate the instruction of a tragedy, and the winner would be the dramatist who made the city profit most from his instruction. Though pedagogy is present in the plays, it does not operate as a central organizing focus for them. Lesky believes that the art of drama suffers when subordinated to a program of instruction. He cautions critics to distinguish between "pedagogic intention" and "pedagogic effect."¹³

As Aristophanes' Frogs illustrates, Greek tragedy was closely connected to the polis, the community. For example, Aeschylus' Orestes is acquitted of murdering his mother and allowed to return to his home in Argos which will be a loyal ally to Athens. The drama was originally performed when an alliance with Argos was essential for Athens in her stance against Sparta. In The Persians Aeschylus has no single Greek hero mentioned by name, rather it is the community that has triumphed and been sustained by the gods. Sophocles' Ajax and Antigone both consider the balance of individual and societal claims. Ajax, the individual, would slaughter those in authority to regain his personal honor. His concerns are personal, not for the polis. Eventually in Greek tragedy the tragic hero would be presented consistently as one who had performed a

valuable service for the city-state. Oedipus has benefitted Thebes by ridding them of the dreaded Sphynx with its riddles. Antigone argues for the eternal laws of the gods to honor her dead brother Polynices with proper burial. She contends that the polis ought never be in conflict with the laws of the gods. The chorus agrees with her. Creon, the king, does not represent the wishes of the polis in his adamant, arrogant and evil refusal to allow the burial of Polynices. Teiresias, the seer, charges Creon with having polluted himself and the city in his decision. The chorus had expressed the wishes of the polis, and his rejection of their wishes was a disservice to the community. The chorus often functioned as the spokesmen of a given city-state, commenting on the action, voicing the concerns of the community. Thus Greek tragedy sought to touch the reality of the life of the polis for in a sense it was the community's story too.

Many scholars have attempted to clarify Aristotle's description of Greek tragedy. They seek to classify Greek tragedies by theme, story pattern or world view. Albin Lesky divides tragedy into three classifications: 1) the totally tragic world view, 2) the total tragic conflict, and 3) the tragic situation.¹⁴ The "totally tragic world view" presents a schema of forces and values which are predestined to clash and inevitably result in destruction. The suffering and ruin are virtually unexplained by any transcendent purpose. The "total tragic conflict" is not as broad in its scope, but its situation of conflict offers no escape and ends in destruc-

tion. Since it is not a world view, this is a special case within a transcendent whole whose laws give meaning to the suffering and death. If the hero can come to realize these laws, then the conflict resolution may be on a higher level than that of death. The "tragic situation" appears to be a predicament with no escape from a predetermined ruin, but perhaps some divine assistance will rescue the hero in the twelfth hour. Lesky contends that all three categories are still tragedies both in their content and as literary genre.¹⁵

These three classes distinguish tragic suffering or a tragic situation of a story or myth from the tragic suffering that is perceived as a representative of the whole of human life. Greek tragedy would not be included in the first category because the Greek dramas were not whole world views. They did not see all human life as subject to tragic suffering. Only the great could suffer greatly. To put it another way, a fall from a step ladder does not arouse pity and fear. An ordinary business man who is the father of seven who is killed in a car accident may qualify as a sad or pitiable situation, but it is not tragic in the Greek sense.

The second class of "total tragic conflict" would apply to those Greek tragedies where the hero is defeated by the consequences of his downfall. The third category of "tragic situation" would be appropriate to describe the reconciliation dramas where the hero is rescued from his fate by the gods.

Such categories also serve to illuminate the role of the trans-

cent in Greek tragedy. The first "total tragic world view" has no transcendent interplay, and thus a world devoid of meaning. The other two classes offer a divine order of some sort and with it meaning and purpose for human suffering. If the hero is totally destroyed in the tragic conflict, transcendence may appear either in his own act of self-assertion or in a direct address to a higher world of meaning. The self-assertion may serve to elevate a value above human life, as is the case in Ajax and Antigone. Oedipus Rex has the hero exit a blind, broken, homeless, defunct ruler, but he has gained wisdom in self-knowledge and acceptance of the god's will. Something uplifting and imperishable has been evoked in these stories of tragic conflict. Greek tragedy is not totally pessimistic, rather it discovers new wells of strength and hope in man transcending himself and in his self-sufficiency, or in the rare glimpses of the divine order that one man's story revealed. It is perhaps no coincidence that the disappearance of Greek tragedy happened at the same time that the plays lost their religious depth.¹⁶ Perhaps the Attic tragedies did not present tragic suffering as open to all, but it did imbue the listener with the glory, greatness, and grandeur that could belong to man, if only he can transcend his limitations.

Lattimore presents a study of patterns of tragic narratives which include: hamartia as tragic flaw with special consideration to the pride and punishment sub-theme; choice patterns that encompass the recognition and discovery, suppliant, sacrifice, and revenge

plays; and the truth plays which are represented by the indestructible man and lost one patterns. Lattimore indicates that no one pattern is superior to any other, nor does the use of one pattern exclude the use of another pattern.

Lattimore's hamartia pattern is close to the description of tragedy from Aristotle's Poetics: the story of the downfall of a good or noble person through some character flaw such as pride, ambition or impiety. Lattimore differs from Aristotle in his contention that the actual use of hamartia in Greek tragedies does not support it as a permanent characteristic, but instead holds that it is a misidentification of a person.¹⁷ This view would seem to contradict the status of the flaw as also being the virtue which brought the man to heroic stature in the first place. Lattimore obviously does not place physis, a natural trait, and hamartia in the same camp. I find the misidentification theory interesting, but not convincing in its application to actual tragedies.

Lattimore's attempt to apply hamartia as tragic flaw recognizes that the theme does not operate as the primary shaper of tragedies. His applications of the tragic flaw motif to Ajax, Antigone and Oedipus at Colonus show insight into the character motivation, yet fail to notice that the unrepentant, stubborn and prideful Ajax, Antigone and Oedipus might not be judged as "flawed", but as extreme in their pursuit of honor, loyalty, justice and truth. His comments on Antigone hint that a "flaw" may not always be seen as a weakness.

In terms of the pride-punishment theme, Lattimore offers a long and varied list of meanings for hybris which is often considered simply punishable pride. The list includes: assault and battery, rape, foul play, physical disaster without motivation, the activity of wild animal spirits, rapacity and greed, sexual lust, violence in general, violent or criminal behavior, bullying, the abuse of superior strength to humiliate the helpless living or dead, mockery of the sorrowful, mutiny or rebelliousness of an inferior toward a superior, or ordinary insolence.¹⁸ The term hybris is most often used in tragedies to connote an abuse of power, but is certainly not a technical term.

The Greeks believed that the gods resented and punished hybris, yet the pride and punishment patterns rarely mention hybris. It appears that man was not viewed as usually being in a position to commit hybris against the gods. But the gods seem to commit hybris in their treatment of man as they abuse their superior strength to punish man.

. . . when . . . the divine antagonist takes his place as a full-scale character in a story, he loses his moral invulnerability . . . the righteous grievance of the avenger is lost . . . in the cruelty of the vengeance . . . if the cause of the suffering is a person, however august or holy, or divine, there is danger of revulsion.¹⁹

This has serious ramifications for the divine-human relationship. If tragedy was to transcend the human realm and glimpse at divine knowledge, what might man find? The goddess Athena invited Odysseus to laugh at his destroyed enemy, Ajax (line 79), but he refused this mockery or ridicule. So too, Odysseus rejected the

human standard of mockery represented in Agamemnon who wants to refuse burial to Ajax. Odysseus will hate only when it is honorable to hate; he knows its limits better than other men or the goddess. So too, the god Dionysus, in Euripides' The Bacchae, seems brutal and childish in his dealings with man. His attempt to defend his actions fail to sway anyone to his point of view (lines 1344-50; 1374-8). Divine justice and knowledge would seem assuredly not to be measured by human standards.

The Greek dramatists faced the sticky job of defending divine righteousness and omnipotence, even when it seemed petulant or excessive in its punishment, while also recognizing that even with "loaded dice" a story required some human responsibility and choice.²⁰ Without human choice the gods' oppressive rule of fate would absolve man of any responsibility for his own life. The need for human choice was also recognized by Plato. His resolution of the fate-free will tension is presented in a reasoned argument that a new soul about to begin a new life chose its life, and once chosen the course for the life was compulsory. "The responsibility is the chooser's; the god is not responsible . . ." (Republic 10.617d-e). Plato's answer does not solve the issue, for the soul's choice is made in ignorance. It does serve to support the need for choice or the illusion of choice if one is to have a responsible society or an interesting drama.

In the choice patterns, the moment of choice, real or illusory, shapes the action which follows. The choice may be a matter of

refusing to abandon a choice one has already made as in Prometheus, Antigone and Philoctetes. The dramatic action that follows usually consists of attempts to dissuade the person from his position. Generally, once a choice has been made, it is irrevocable. However, at times a choice may be reversed either by argumentation or divine intervention.

Lattimore refers to Rivier's theory that the tragic hero must make "une decision capitale souvent mortelle, toujours irrevocable."²¹ Although the "one decision theory" is useful, Lattimore notes that some plays have many choices, others have no major choice but several minor choices, and still others have no choice at all. Not all the choices are plainly stated and some are outright deceptive. Ajax's oblique reference to going "where I must go" in the total framework of a speech seemingly rejecting suicide, would seem a choice for life, yet he leaves to commit suicide. In The Women of Trachis a double deception is worked. Deianeira gives her husband a shirt with the intention of keeping him loving her forever, and the shirt kills him. The choice to give it shapes the action, but the choice is made without full knowledge of its implications. Some plays cover the very same heroic action, yet may not share the moment of choice. Sophocles' Electra has no agonized choice as in Euripides' version of the same drama. Pure moments of choice are missing in discovery plays, truth plays, pride and punishment stories, revenge dramas, and in stories of escape. The question is not "What am I to do?" but "Who am I?" An escape or revenge play does

not question whether or what to do, but asks how to do it.²²

Choices are not always irrevocable, though that is the customary pattern. In most instances when a choice is made, the other alternatives are excluded forever. Whereas in real life change is possible, even plausible and probable, in drama vacillation and recantations do not make a good story. When a drama has a choice revoked, it is most often by a divine fiat. Now that makes a good story.

Choice is often illusionary, for fate rules the action. Many speeches were firmly established in the legendary sources of the Greek tragedies. Aeschylus has his chorus comment in The Persians, "Ate (Infatuation) seduces the pulls; Moira, fate or the way things happen, pushes: so much for choice."²³ (lines 93-114).

Still some plays do have choice as a valid and substantial element. The suppliant play has the persecuted and helpless take refuge in Athens where the king knows that if he accepts them, war will follow; yet if he rejects them, he faces the risk of disapproval from the gods and men. The king chooses to protect them, battles and usually the righteous suppliants prevail. The characters are stock and the action tends to be slow with the issues open to public debate. Choice shapes the play, but the production is lacking the depth and proportions of most Attic tragedy.²⁴

The sacrifice play is often a story of gods asking for human sacrifice, and the victim, a young virgin, eventually choosing to

die as an act of self-devotion. Related to this is the suicide of a hero whose death in battle is immanent. The hero hopes that his self-sacrifice will buy victory for his side from the gods. Self-immolation was usually a private act that did not benefit the state, rather it aided either the victim or his family. The hero would perceive death as necessary, whether by divine decree or otherwise, consented to it, and made the act his own.²⁵ The choice takes on significance as it is often the climax of the play, and its value is determined by the hero's own reasoning for his death.

The truth plays are centered on a lie that has been perpetrated. All activity is focused toward the revelation of the truth. The lost loved one awaits reunion, recognition, rescue, and restoration. The indestructible man is still a man, and the truth of his mortality must be known. The invincible one has one fatal weapon, one weak spot, one defenseless moment which will be found out. What is the point in a drama of having an indestructible man unless he is to be destroyed? The indestructible man usually falls to either a philos, a near and dear one, or to himself. Ultimately the hero destroys himself for he commits some offense like pride or impiety, realizes the pattern of his life and its meaning, and discovers he must die to preserve his honor, his pride, his person, his principles.²⁶

These patterns of tragedy are a helpful resource, especially for this study of the Saul narrative found in 1 Samuel 9-31. By means of comparison to the choice patterns of revenge or sacrifice,

or the truth pattern of the indestructible man, the affinities so often noted in the Saul story can be more closely examined and evaluated. Along with the description of tragedy from Aristotle's Poetics and Lesky's three classes of tragedy, the notion of tragedy has been sufficiently fleshed out to begin to see the complexities involved in attempting to define Greek tragedy. There is no magic formula that says it all. For the purposes of this paper, Greek tragedy will be defined by Aristotle's description as further enlightened and enhanced by Lesky's two classifications of "total tragic conflict" and "tragic situation", and in consideration of Lattimore's distinctions of narrative story patterns in tragedy. Therefore, Greek tragedy is defined as an imitation of an action of a certain magnitude in which the tragic hero, a man of noble stature, great but not perfect, suffers a change of fortune resulting in his downfall. The downfall comes as the result of the action of both a divine power as well as from the hero's own actions. His downfall is not wholly deserved and this causes pity and fear in the audience. The tragic fall is not a pure loss as some betterment, awareness, reconciliation, knowledge, or gain is attained by the hero. The katharsis serves to exhilarate the audience as they realize a new aspect of human greatness. A tragedy may be characterized as either a "total tragic conflict" or as a "tragic situation" ending in either destruction or reconciliation. The story pattern may be one of hamartia as an act of ignorance (not as a tragic flaw), of choice, or of a truth action story line.

Notes

¹William McAvoy (ed), Dramatic Tragedy, (NY: Webster Division, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), pp. ix-xi; Laurence Perrine, Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense, (Chicago: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1970), pp. 1031-331.

²Aristotle, Poetics, Chapter VI, lines 1-17 discuss his theory of tragedy more fully.

³Moses Hadas (ed), The Complete Plays of Sophocles, tr. by Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb, (NY: Bantam, 1967), p. xi.

⁴Albin Lesky, Greek Tragedy, tr. by H.A. Frankfort, (London: Ernest Benn Lmted., 1978; NY: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979), p. 40.

⁵Hadas, pp. xiv-xv.

⁶Lesky, p. 40.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Richard Lattimore, Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy, (London: Athlone Press, 1964), p. 8.

⁹Lesky, p. 18.

¹⁰Lesky, p. 98.

¹¹Lattimore, pp. 13-14.

¹²Ibid, p. 15.

¹³Lesky, p. 18.

¹⁴Ibid, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 188.

¹⁷Lattimore, p. 19.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁹Ibid, pp. 25-6.

²⁰Ibid, p. 27.

²¹Lattimore, p. 29 quoting Rivier's Essai sur le tragique d'Euripide, p. 33.

²²Lattimore, pp. 36-7.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid, pp. 46-7.

²⁵Ibid, pp. 47-9.

²⁶Ibid, pp. 53-5.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT 1 SAMUEL 9-31

For the purposes of this study the biblical text of 1 Samuel 9-31 will be considered as the text appears in its present form. All quotations will be from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted. In studying the present text, it is valuable to consider the process that led to the text as we now have it. The transmission of text seem to have occurred in several stages with overlapping, redaction, and creation of new material possible at each stage of the process. Some consider the present text the result of the conflation of an older pro-monarchical narrative, revised by an anti-monarchical source, a prophetic edition, and a pro-David narrative with a deuteronomistic redaction framing the whole work, while others note that the notion of blocks of material being joined does not seem likely because many blocks seem contaminated with material from other sources. McCarthy suggests that such a jigsaw puzzle approach has its basic problem in the

assumption that the steps in the tradition are absolutes, documents . . . develop by jumping from one such fixed point to another. . . . traditional literature is more like an organic flow in which each telling of the tradition recreates the tradition on its own terms, and no two tellings, even by one storyteller, are exactly the same.¹

McCarthy proposes that the text developed first from individual narratives, then cycles of stories gathered about a central figure such as Saul or David. And in the third step the deuteronomistic

school organized the traditional elements which preceded into a history.² Each of the stages of development had its own setting and intention which have contributed texture to the fabric of the final product. McCarthy presents his argument as an explanation of 1 Samuel 8-12 as a formal closing of the period of judges and the formal beginning of the monarchy, yet the basic concept of the narrative development would seem applicable to the whole of 1 Samuel 9-31.

The widely accepted theory of the Early Samuel and Late Samuel sources places the "early" source as having been written near 1000 B.C. and the "late" source dating somewhere between 900 and 700 B.C. The "early" source is believed to have been written by a priest, possibly Abiathar, who was a contemporary of David. Whoever the author, this person was the first to write history, several hundred years before Herodotus.³ Some scholars contend that these two sources were conflated during the seventh century, and revised and re-edited by a deuteronomistic tradition around 550 B.C. The text in its present form bears evidence of legend, pro-monarchical sources, anti-monarchical strata, prophetic touches, pro-David concerns and deuteronomistic theologizing all framed in a series of stories and historical reports. The multiple traditions each contribute a special flavor and purpose to the total of the Saul narrative.

1 Samuel 9

Chapter 9 introduces the second episode of the early source. Chapter 8 had concluded that a king must be allowed for Israel, and Chapter 9 begins with the entrance of the prospective king. The genealogy (v. 1) begins with its focus not on Saul, but on his father, Kish, a gibbôr. McCarter considers the term to refer to "social standing and implies economic power", though he also notes that it may refer to a warrior.⁴ The genealogy is longer than usual, and leads McCarter to suggest that it may originally have continued on into a description of a miraculous birth of Saul as is done in Judges 13 for Samson.⁵ Saul is presented with some admiration as the "handsome son" (v. 2), and since good looks were believed to be a "physical symptom of special divine favor", one expects good fortune for Saul.⁶ One suspects he stands head and shoulders above the rest, not only physically, but also in terms of special favor before Yahweh. Mauchline suggests that handsome is not the best translation, and prefers the phrase, "no better man than he" or "no finer man than he."⁷ The Hebrew, bāḥûr wāṭôb, leads some critics to argue that Saul must be a young man,⁸ but Caird indicates that it could refer to a man in the "prime of his life."⁹ The age of Saul is not the issue so much as what it implies, i.e., that this narrative could not belong to the early source if Saul is a young man because the early source generally presents Saul as old enough to have his son, Jonathon.

The search for some lost asses of Kish (vv. 3-4) seems more

like local gossip than historical narrative according to Mauchline.¹⁰ Yet this little venture unfolds into the discovery of the prospective king. The cities mentioned in the search are generally conceded as difficult, if not impossible, to locate with any certainty. One does sense that an extensive tour was made as Saul and his servant seek the lost stock.

When the search is about to be called to a halt by Saul, because he fears his father may be more anxious about him than the animals, the servant suggests they consult a nearby "man of God" (vv. 5-6). Apparently Saul does not know of Samuel, implying that Samuel was a local seer rather than a national leader. It is curious that the servant knows of the "man of God", but Saul does not.

The narrative then considers the problem of the interview fee (vv. 7-10). Just when one expects the journey to be aborted, the servant produces an acceptable offering. Whether this item was intended to serve as a gift or a fee depends on one's interpretation. Scholars generally agree that the word is either corrupt or doubtful,¹¹ and S.M. Paul refers to the Medieval exegete Menahem ben Saroq who listed the fourth division of the root "to see" and defined it as a "fee of seeing (i.e., having an interview) which they bring to the seer".¹² Paul further notes that an Akkadian form of "to see" gives a similar gift connotation, specifically, "a gift brought to a king on the occasion of an audience with him . . ."¹³ The size of the gift may have been commensurate with the size and

nature of the favor one intended to request. Paul declares that this is the best way to understand the Hebrew phrase of vs. 7.

Related to this is Curtis' study of 1 Samuel 9:5aB which he suggests is a folk etymology of nābî' and not a mere gloss or marginal note. Curtis sees vs. 9 as the climax of the small narrative which could be deleted without harming the continuity of the remaining text. Furthermore, the central issue of this vignette, the fee, never again appears outside these verses. The story could have originated as an oral folk etymology to answer the question, "Why does one call the seer, the man of God, the oracle-giver by the title nābî'?" The answer involved a word play on nābî': "He is called nābî' because we bring (nābî') gifts to him to obtain the oracle."¹⁴ As an actual etymology vs. 9 is hard to substantiate for few nouns are formed from first plural imperfect. The tradition of bringing gifts to the nābî' has some basis in the pre-literary prophets where the practice of gift-giving for oracles is well attested (1 Kgs 13:7; 14:3; 2 Kgs 4:42; 5:5, 15; 8:8).¹⁵ Since the story probably circulated independently before being joined to the larger Saul narrative, whether Samuel in fact charged a consultation fee is not the crux of the story. The placement of the nābî' word play in a conversation concerning Samuel stirs curiosity about the distinction of the titles, "man of God", "seer", and "prophet".

McCarter accepts the etymological explanation, but also contends that the story develops a theme of a divinely guided journey where "Saul in his innocence asks the man of God to inform (higgîd)

him about the lost asses, but what he is informed is that he is to be prince (nāgîd) over Israel."¹⁶ He also interprets the discovery of the quarter shekel of silver to be divinely directed. McCarter states that the distinctions between seer, prophet, and man of God were made to explain obsolete vocabulary to the audience.¹⁷

Hertzberg, on the other hand, contends that vs. 9 is important in its identification of Samuel, its confirmation of two sources being joined, and in its theological development.¹⁸ The terms seer, prophet, and man of God are not merely antiquated vocabulary, but signs of a merger of traditions.

The young women of vs. 11 coming to draw water are performing a typical household chore. In this, Alter finds a parallel to the "betrothal-type scenes." One might expect Saul to help draw water, have the girls run and tell of this stranger's arrival and so forth as in the Jacob story. But that is not what happens. Rather Saul inquires about the man of God, and the expected betrothal is aborted.¹⁹ This journey will not bring Saul a wife, but a kingdom.

Gunn notes that all is urgency in vss. 11-13. Saul is told to "make haste" for Samuel has "just now" come to the city in order to offer sacrifice "today". Saul will meet him "as soon as" he enters the city. Saul must hurry and catch him before the sacrifice, "now go up" and meet him "immediately."²⁰ The reader also hurries thinking something big must come from all this frenzy, and he is not disappointed. Where here Saul's haste meets with success, and he gains a crown, later Saul's hurry will result in trouble and

the loss of the kingship.

Vss. 15-16 are retrospective and show Samuel to be in the mold of a seer and prophet guided by God in the selection of Israel's prince. With vs. 17, these verses are the only ones in the entire tale of the lost asses that are not told from the perspective of Saul. The information disclosed could not be known by any mortal man, and the idiom of "uncovering Samuel's ears" implies that this was never heard before; it is a secret, a revelation.²¹

Saul will be annointed nāgîd, not king (melek). He is to be an "appointed one", a "designated one" who has either already assumed duties or has not yet begun to serve.²² He is not called king, as Hertzberg notes, until political honor comes with public acclaim in 11:15.²³ Anointing itself could refer to "a symbolic transfer of sanctity from the deity to an object or person", and was not always associated with royalty, but for Israel that was its primary understanding.²⁴

Vs. 16 links Saul's appointment with the suffering of Israel at the hands of the Philistines. It is to be the job of the anointed to save Israel and to rule over the people. This explanation of his office and duties comes from Yahweh. "Without his will and his calling, the new office is impossible."²⁵ The evil wish and request of the people for a king must be made good by Yahweh's revelation and anointing of the king. Saul is chosen by Yahweh to "rule over" the people of Yahweh, Israel. "Ruling over" ('asār) is used only

twice, here and in 10.1. 'Asār meant literally to "keep in check", and only one with the Lord could ever be able to do that.²⁶

The reference to "all that is on your mind" in vs. 19 suggests that there is something more than lost asses on Saul's mind. Some critics raise the question whether Saul was already concerned about the Philistine threat for Israel; others more boldly conjecture that Saul was probably thinking about the "state of Israel, and maybe had plans of his own." These views seems unfounded in the text. Samuel tells Saul that the asses have been found. In v. 20 Samuel enigmatically says that all that is good in Israel is for Saul and his family. Perhaps Samuel is facing a confused and puzzled Saul who is not certain that he knows just what is going on, nor sure that he wants a part of it. The suggestion by Samuel that "all that is precious in Israel" is to be Saul's and his family's is just as obscure as the "all" that is supposedly on his mind. To the reader, v. 20 appears to be a promise of grandeur, but Saul had no reason to know that it might mean an impending office. And perhaps that is the function of those lines, to encourage the reader to anticipate what special favor is awaiting Saul. The only way Saul could possibly know what is going on would be if he had received a divine revelation, which he has not. The word play in verse 18 is irony not E.S.P. Saul's request "tell me" (haggîdâ-nā lî) could also mean "designate me" (lehaggîd), but nothing indicates that Saul expected to be designated for anything.²⁷

Saul's answer in vs. 21 shows either great humility or was

"an example of the elaborate self-abasement which is an important ingredient in Eastern good manners."²⁸ McCarter further suggests that it could be the typical response of an individual called into God's service (Ex 3-4; Jdgs 6:15).²⁹ A common motif in the Bible is the raising up of the lowly to lofty positions. Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin, the "least of the tribes of Israel" and Saul claims his family to be the "humblest". If his father is a gibbôr as verse 1 tells us, then this claim of Saul's would seem to be an example of that polite humility and good manners.

Saul and his servant are then invited to join the other guests, and are seated at the head of the table (vv. 22-24). A special portion of the sacrificial animal has been set aside specifically for Saul. The journey has most certainly been divinely guided from the lost asses to the found coin to the girls telling him to hurry. Saul is now the guest of honor, given the thigh portion generally reserved for priests.³⁰

After spending the night, Saul arises early and Samuel escorts him to the outskirts of town (vv. 25-7). Having made certain that the servant was sent ahead, Samuel privately discloses the word of God to Saul. By now, even Saul must suspect something great will be revealed to him.

1 Samuel 10

Saul is anointed by Samuel without any further witnesses, but it is the Lord doing the anointing according to Samuel. The anointing acted as a sacramental consecration of the king to Yahweh, an

act which gains its significance not from the material used, but from the one who bestowed it, Yahweh. Hertzberg claims that this "stamps on the person concerned a special character, which never disappears."³¹ Samuel kisses Saul (v. 1) which could be a part of the ceremony, or a sign of affection.

Verses 2-6 inform Saul of the signs that will confirm Samuel as a prophet acting with the authority of Yahweh. The first sign will come from a neutral source, two men will tell Saul that the asses have been found and that his father is now concerned about him. The place, Rachel's tomb, would be on a direct route from Ramah to Saul's home. The second sign involves three men on their way to worship God at Bethel who will give him two leaves of bread. Hertzberg reads this as a reference back to 9:7 where Saul and his servant had no bread, and thus an act of Providence.³² Others consider that since Saul is receiving bread devoted to offering, Saul is now to be considered like the priests, consecrated and a legitimate eater of holy bread.³³ Caird contends that this gift of bread is the royal tribute that Saul had a right to expect.³⁴ Hertzberg's explanation makes the most sense. If Saul's anointing was without witnesses, why would anyone be offering him tribute or treating him as a priest? Hertzberg's explanation follows the story line of a divinely guided journey that has been working since 9:3 when Saul was sent to seek the lost animals.

The third sign is the only one which the remaining narrative actually follows through. When Saul encounters the ecstatic

prophets he receives the "spirit of the Lord". The experience makes Saul "another man", aware that he has been chosen to be an instrument of God. The spirit of God does not lead Saul at this time to some extraordinary military feat as it effected the judges in the past. Rather, it makes him "another man". Critics seem to agree that this spirit would alter Saul in some way, but the nature of that change is debated. McCarter declares that Saul would lose himself;³⁵ Mauchline argues that Saul would become a new man with the gifts necessary for a national leader;³⁶ Caird recognizes this would transform Saul's character, "changing his diffidence into headstrong courage."³⁷

In verse 7 Samuel frees Saul to act on his own initiative "for God is with you." Many critics agree that this verse is fulfilled when Saul acts daringly with prophetic spontaneous action in calling the tribes to battle against the Ammonite forces holding Jabesh-gilead. The suggestion of vs. 7 is to surrender to impulse because it is from the Lord, and it appears to contradict the editorial vs. 8 which tells Saul he is to wait for Samuel who will tell him what to do. The insertion of vs. 8 prepares the way for 13:7b-15a, another late addition to the text. The juxtaposition of vss. 7-8 with their contradictory signals to Saul foreshadows a future of ambiguous orders. If Saul is to pave the way for monarchy, he walks in a fog being shouted directions to stop and go, both at the same time.

As he leaves Samuel, Saul is given a "new heart" by God

(vs. 9). This phrase appears similar in intent to the "another man" of v. 6. Hertzberg notes that this is not to be confused with a conversion, rather it is a preparation for God's interaction with Saul. The other two signs are quickly dispatched by "all these signs came to pass that day." (v. 9). McCarter thinks this is probably a summary which replaces a longer narration of the first two signs coming to pass.³⁸

In vs. 10 Saul is seized by the spirit of God and prophesies. Observers who know Saul comment on his unusual behavior. The act that confirms the anointing by the Lord of Saul also serves to make others suspect of Saul's association with dubious ecstatic prophets. Such prophets roved from town to town and had no special lineage to claim whereas Saul came from a good family. Furthermore, such prophecy was often considered "raving" by madmen. McCarter links the proverb to the later antagonism of Saul toward the prophets, and explains that the saying communicated the sense that someone unlikely to be associated with them had joined the ranks of the prophets.³⁹ Since little is known for certain about the ecstatic prophets, the story may give an origin for the proverb, "Is Saul among the prophets too?", but it does not clearly state the significance of the proverb. It is difficult to tell if this is considered a positive or negative influence on Saul by the observers. In the larger context, Saul's prophesying has a positive value because it confirms his anointing.

In vss. 14-16 Saul returns home and tells his uncle nothing

about the anointing. Such secrecy may be a mark of humility, confusion or an attempt to maintain the secrecy begun by the private anointing. It is noteworthy that it is Saul's uncle, and not his father who comes to greet him. It is also interesting that Samuel who was previously not known to Saul, was known by his uncle.

Samuel gathers the people together at Mizpah to consult Yahweh and determine his choice for king. This passage (10:17-19) belongs to the later source and follows 8:22 which ordered Samuel to obey the people and make them a king. Samuel is again presented as a national leader, and his address here parallels chapter 8. This could support 10:17-27 as the sequel to 8:22 or 8:1-9. In either case, 10:17-27 tells of Saul being selected as king, not nāgîd, and Samuel acts as the instrument of God in bringing this about.

Using the prophetic messenger formula, Samuel berates the people for their demand of a king. The oracle of judgment contrasts the good done by Yahweh (vs. 18) with the people's rejection of and ingratitude toward Yahweh (vs. 19). The accusation is followed by the announcement that Yahweh is now giving them a king who will be chosen by sacred lots. Normally in the prophetic judgment oracle one would expect to hear the judgment given at this point, instead Yahweh has yielded to the people and will select for them a king. "It would be overstating the case only slightly to say that this arrangement implies that the gift of a king is a kind of punishment."⁴⁰ It seems that the prophetic narrator chose to

present the monarchy's origin in a negative light. Hertzberg views the scene more favorably as a confirmation of the secret divine revelation and anointing of chapter 9.⁴¹

The selection of Saul as king (10:20-24) is "fraught with difficulties" from the critic's standpoint.⁴² Saul was obviously not among the Matrites' family when the selection was made. The man by man elimination that found Saul the new king, is followed by a search for the missing king-elect. The giant of a man is found hidden among the baggage. Why would Saul hide? If he was so big how could he slip away and hide? McCarter suggests that the use of casting lots to determine criminals, together with the judgment oracle that makes having a king sound like a punishment, in turn make Saul's designation as king appear to be a finger pointing at Saul, the guilty one.⁴³ If McCarter is correct, then Saul has good reason to hide. Still the people do acclaim him king de jure.

To counter all this talk of punishment McCarthy's discussion of the wrath of Yahweh demonstrates the consistent theology and literary style of the deuteronomistic historian as he employs the "anger of Yahweh formula" and the "provocation of Yahweh formula." The anger formula explicitly states that the covenant has been broken and the divine judgment of penalty follows. The provocation formula is not so closely aligned with an announcement of penalty. The penalty is not inevitable. The provocation formula is most often used to speak of the sins of kings. The transitions from one era or leader to another are focal points for the use of the divine

anger formula. In 1 Samuel 10 and again later, the people are reminded that they have rejected Yahweh, but there is no mention of Yahweh's anger, as one would expect. Rather by 12:8-12 there is a renewal of covenant. Monarchy is not being set up as sin, but as Yahweh's gift.⁴⁴ Therefore, McCarter's suggestion that this is a punishment scene fails to consider chapter 10 in the larger context of chapter 12 where monarchy is accepted and the covenant reaffirmed.

It is odd to note that Samuel's one positive recommendation for Saul as king is his large size.

The book of "rights and duties of the kingship" mentioned in v. 25 may not have actually existed according to Caird, who feels that if it actually did exist the writer "could hardly have refrained from quoting it."⁴⁵ McCarter contends that it refers to an actual document now either lost or unidentified.⁴⁶ Mauchline suggests that the book would have contained a listing of the rights and duties of royal rule with an emphasis on the king's position as a service to Yahweh.⁴⁷ Whether it was historically a reality is unimportant for the storyline, what is important is that monarchy is conceived from the start with a set of rules so that one could know what should be done. If Saul is unsure of his duties as king, he does have a guidebook to consult.

In v. 26 as the people have been sent home, Saul has "men of valor" accompany him because their "hearts God had touched". At the same time an ominous note is struck by the apparent dissension

that already exists, for some "worthless fellows" regard Saul as not fit for the job, despised him and brought no present. The author has shown his own disgust for these men by calling them "worthless". Their attitude is "tantamount to doubting the decision of God."⁴⁸ Saul shows himself confident that he will be able to prove himself in time and he holds his peace.

1 Samuel 11

Verses 1-4 begin the third narrative describing Saul's entrance into the kingship. The different sanctuaries probably had their established traditions about Saul's rise, i.e., Mizpah (10:17-27), Ramah (9:1-10:16), and Gilgal (11:1-15). Mizpah, a Benjamite sanctuary, Ramah, the home of Samuel, and Gilgal are not certain sources, but they are likely bearers of the various traditions.

Jabesh-gilead besieged by Ammonites led by Nahash who has "negotiated" terms of surrender, can now ask the Israelites west of the Jordan for aid. Nahash wants to humiliate them, and thinks so little of the Israelites that he agrees to the seven day reprieve. It is with insolence and contempt that Nahash allows the week long respite, for if in seven days no aid comes, the humiliation will be even greater for Jabesh-gilead and the men of Israel.

The people of Gibeah hear the news and weep, and Saul learns the news almost by accident, rather than by design. Saul is not presented as a recognized king at the start of this narrative, he is only a farmer coming from the field with oxen. Evidently the Mizpah tradition is not operative here, or those bearing the news

did not know of it.

The spirit of God comes upon Saul and he is moved to anger and action. His call to action is not a king's order, rather it is more in line with the symbolic act that called the tribal confederacy to join for battle. "The symbolic dismembering of the oxen may be regarded as a kind of conditional curse: may the oxen of anyone who does not respond to the summons as agreed suffer the same fate!"⁴⁹ Furthermore, covenants often involved the dismembering of an animal with an oath that suggested a similar fate to those who did not keep the covenant terms. Hertzberg notes the close affinity with Judges 19 where the body of the dead concubine is cut in parts and sent to summon Israel to battle. The similarity is hardly a coincidence.⁵⁰ The symbolic action also shows Saul's character as no longer modest and shy, but taking bold, decisive action, under the promptings of the spirit of God upon him.

The people of Israel respond with the "dread of the Lord" upon them, a term usually applied to Israel's enemies, paralyzed and disabled in battle. Here the term mobilizes Israel to battle and victory. Mauchline explains that the term as used here may mean that the people feared that the curse would be actually fulfilled. Or Mauchline maintains that Saul was perceived as "in Spirit" the terror of God and so possessed a power to be feared.⁵¹

The number of Saul's troops seems greatly exaggerated. In reality, the soldiers were probably men from the central region who shared a concern about the Ammonite threat most immediately, and

therefore comprised the majority of the army. The message is sent that help is on its way, and Jabesh-gilead informs Nahash of their intention to surrender. This ploy serves to bolster the confidence of the Ammonites.

Saul's attack is fashioned after Gideon's three division attack on the Midianites (Jdgs 7:16). Victory is complete and Saul proves himself an able military leader. Saul's charism is to be recognized by all.

Verses 12-14 are a redactional attempt to reconcile the various accounts of Saul's rise to the throne. The "worthless fellows" of 10:27 are spared by Saul who shows generosity and forbearance. The victory is attributed to Yahweh affirming Saul's role as servant to Yahweh. The kingship is renewed (v. 14), which suggests that the kingship of Mizpah was recognized as a reality. Some critics believe that "consecrate" should be read in the place of "renew", a change that would serve to thwart the harmonizing effort. Saul the king de jure, is now the king de facto. Though the story begins like a call to action in Judges, this narrative places all Israel as involved in the proceedings and in the end Saul is made king. The king is seen as the successor of the temporary leadership of the judges, a new office legitimized by Yahweh and inspired by his spirit.⁵²

1 Samuel 12

This chapter is a continuation of the source which appeared in chapters 7 and 8 as well as in 10:17-27. Whereas some critics

contend that it bears a marked anti-monarchical strain and is the work of the deuteronomistic compiler, but as McCarthy interprets it, this chapter announces the deuteronomistic historian's acceptance of kingship and is ultimately a sign of hope.⁵³ It is indeed "preached history" as Hertzberg notes,⁵⁴ and like Jdgs 2:6-3:6 it sheds theological light on the political system. In Judges the preached history serves to introduce the period of judges by looking back on the days of Joshua. Here the speech looks ahead to the period of monarchy. Though it is supposedly directed to the people of Samuel's day, many of the concerns suggest that it is meant to address the Israelites of the sixth century B.C.

Samuel's statement that he has "made a king" (v. 1) over the people refers back to 8:22 and 10:17-27, but the intruding story of the Jabesh-gilead victory over the Ammonites causes one to place this incident at Gilgal and not at Mizpah. The serious tone of the speech seems inappropriate as part of a joyous victory celebration and coronation. In the deuteronomistic point of view the entire venture into monarchy was a dangerous undertaking, and the placement of chapter 12 is strategic for it gives warning before the start of the reign of the first king. It also gives hope in the final analysis and in the context of vv. 20-24.

"The king walks before you" and "I have walked before you" (v. 2) signal the changing of the guard, the reins of leadership are being handed over to the new monarchy. To "walk before" has shepherd imagery,⁵⁵ and could express that one was performing a function

on the behalf of another.⁵⁶ Samuel insists that his administration was just, and queries, why have they asked for a king. The offenses Samuel denies are all concerning judicial honesty: Samuel has not taken anything from the people, not an ox or ass or bribe of any kind. That the king, on the other hand, will take from the people, is what Samuel wants to imply without stating it outright (vv. 3-5).⁵⁷

The mention of "his anointed" in v. 5 looks like an unusual reference to kingship given the context. The attitude toward the king appears positive, presenting him as one who guarantees that Samuel is innocent of any wrong doing. McCarter interprets it as merely a recognition of new authority, but not as establishing a favorable attitude for "anointed" is not used again in chapter 12. Furthermore, McCarter notes that Samuel is justified by the people (v. 4), not the king.⁵⁸

Verses 6-15 form a self-contained speech in deuteronomistic style which recounts Yahweh's saving acts. Vs. 12 suggests that the demand for a king flowed from the threat of Nahash, giving the gift of king the appearance of another gracious saving act of Yahweh. Hertzberg reads the signs differently and contends that the demand for king is but another apostasy, for when Nahash is mentioned the people do not cry to Yahweh, but instead demand a king. Yahweh relents to the wicked people's wishes, but it is not a gracious saving act in Hertzberg's view.⁵⁹

Vs. 13 speaks of the king as both chosen by the people, and as requested by the people. The later phrase is considered to be

an attempt to correct the text. Verses 14-15 clearly offer the possibility of blessing or curse to the people and their king dependent upon their obedience and faithfulness to Yahweh.

Samuel proves his ability to communicate with Yahweh, and Yahweh's willingness to cooperate by asking for rain to fall on their wheat harvest. This serves to let the people know that they have sinned in asking for a king, and it displays Samuel's close connections with Yahweh. The people beg Samuel to intercede for them, recognizing their sin. The message is clear: a prophet is the proper medium between God and man, not a king.

In Samuel's response (vv. 20-25) to the people's confession, he admonishes them to be steadfast in their faith in the Lord, serving him alone. He further offers his personal services as intercessor and teacher. The people are consoled to hear that asking for a king is not an unforgivable sin, and are admonished again to repent and be faithful. It is significant that the people refer to God as Samuel's God, but Samuel reminds them that God wants to make them a people for himself. This is the relationship Samuel will help bring about by praying for them. Samuel does not really see himself as retiring now that they have a king. The scene ends with Samuel in control, and Saul as the king under a blessing or curse dependent on his action. Saul has been given little room for error, with the emphasis on obedience, so if fault is to be found, it most likely will be a matter of obedience. Gunn interprets the situation as reflecting a "fundamentally hostile"

God waiting for an opportunity to give a good object lesson.⁶⁰

1 Samuel 13

Having been just warned in the previous chapter that obedience is the key to faithfulness to Yahweh, chapter 13 presents Saul as apparently disobeying Samuel's command to wait given in 10:8 which is now also the command of Yahweh. The chapter also presents Jonathan as taking military initiative, which comes to be accredited to Saul. The chapter closes with a mention of Israel's military inferiority in that the Philistines have iron weaponry.

Verse 1 is missing in the LXX^B and defective in all texts in which it survives. The form employed is customary in the subsequent stories of kings as part of the deuteronomistic compiler's chronological frame. Here the numbers were probably not available to him and he left blank spaces for some later writer to fill in. That is the most commonly accepted explanation for the difficulties presented by this verse. Some translations have attempted to supply numbers that are at best good guesses, or at worst, impossibilities, i.e., the Masoretic text places Saul as one year old at the start of his reign.

Althann interprets this verse differently, proposing that it is a poetic couplet, and renders it thus, "More than a year had Saul been reigning, even two years had he been reigning over Israel, . . ."⁶¹ Althann refers to C.H. Gordon's study of Ugaritic prepositions, and argues that the Hebrew min, "from", could also have a comparative sense like the Ugaritic preposition. One could also expect that the Hebrew b might also share a comparative sense. The

deuteronomistic history uses b^e mā^el^e kô preceded by a number in its accession formula, but the non-deuteronomistic use of b^e mā^el^e kô in 1 Kgs 16:11 is not preceded by a number, yet it still indicates the phrase, "when he began to reign . . ." Althann interprets 1 Samuel 13:1 as using the term in a similar fashion, and links v. 1 to v. 2 as a qualifier of when Saul chose the 3,000 men of Israel. Combining this with poetic practices of alliteration, the use of chiastic structures, the sequence of initial consonants, an expanded colon - "a typical Canaanite poetic practice" - syllable count and word pattern, all techniques serve to support and explain the unusual forms of bn and sty snym as not a deuteronomistic accession formula gone awry, but as a poetic couplet. Althann declares it is not corrupt Hebrew, nor is it an attempt to give either Saul's age at accession to the throne, nor the length of his reign. Rather it is a poetic couplet which serves to introduce the act Saul performs in the following verses.⁶² Althann's study is a most enlightening and welcome explanation of an otherwise perplexing verse.

The selection of men in vs. 2 suggests the formation of a standing army to protect the nearby hill country. Jonathan's defeat of the Philistine "garrison", better translated as "officer" or "prefect" (v. 3) precipitates a rebellion which is continued at v. 16 as a pitched battle at the pass of Michmash. The rumor spread (v. 4), but as the text reads Saul calls his own people "Hebrews", a term only used by foreigners. Mauchline, Caird, and McCarter point out that the text is probably corrupt and should read, "and

the Philistines heard, saying, 'The Hebrews (slaves) have revolted!'" This way the rumor of Saul's victory initiates with the Philistines rather than with Saul falsely claiming credit for Jonathan's victory. The significance that Hertzberg and Gunn find in the rumor seems ill founded.⁶³

The Philistine military response to the assassination is probably exaggerated in number and kind. It is unlikely that chariots would be helpful in hill country. The Israelite reaction of panic and flight hint that Saul was not prepared to back up Jonathan's attack, nor was Israel accustomed to fighting as one military unit.

Saul and the trembling army wait the appointed seven days at Gilgal as Samuel had stipulated, but Samuel does not come. The troops begin to desert and Saul feels it is imperative that he act. The sacrifice serves both as religious rite entreating Yahweh's favor in accord with the law, and it also acted as a morale booster. As at Jabesh-gilead, Saul acts decisively, but here meets with disapproval. As soon as Saul finishes offering sacrifice Samuel arrives with uncanny timing to condemn Saul for his disobedience to Yahweh. The command in 10:8 is ambiguous, "wait seven days until I come" for it suggests that the two would occur at the same time, but they do not. The text clearly states that Saul waited the appointed time. Gunn, Smith, Mauchline, Hertzberg and Caird all note that Saul obeyed the seven day wait and think that Samuel failed to keep the appointment. "Samuel's failure to keep his word

would have absolved Saul from all responsibility toward him",⁶⁴
 that "we would adjudge his (Saul's) conduct to have been responsible, considerate and according to protocol."⁶⁵

McCarter considers it a play on the word "appointment" where Saul's failure to keep the appointment with Samuel exactly as stipulated has resulted in the violation of Saul's appointment as king. Therefore Saul's heir will not succeed him to the throne. Now the door is open for Yahweh to choose a man to his own liking.⁶⁶ The notion of dynastic accession was most suspect as it might thwart Yahweh's free selection of a leader as in the time of the judges and prophets.

If Saul has failed to keep the appointment, and not Samuel, how has Saul failed? He did not wait for Samuel to arrive and instead assumed the priestly prerogative associated with sacrifice. But there are incidents where kings offer sacrifice without any prohibition being mentioned (1 Sam 14:33-5; 2 Sam 8:18; 20:26; 1 Kgs 3:3). Furthermore, the author does not go into any priestly concerns at this point. Rather he gives Samuel the words, "You have done foolishly . . ." Saul suffers a defect of wisdom rather than of faith or virtue. He obeyed the letter rather than the spirit of the instruction.⁶⁷ It appears that Saul's failure is that he interpreted the core of the command in the elapse of seven days rather than in the arrival of Samuel.

Samuel's condemnation of Saul shares the ambiguity of the broken command. Saul is told his kingdom will not become a dynasty.

that it "shall not continue" (v. 14) which to Gunn suggests an immediate end for Saul's kingship, for a successor has already been chosen by Yahweh. Certainly Jonathan has no future as king, but Saul's future as king has not been denied.

Saul is allowed no defense beyond his original forthright admission of all he had done and his reasons for it. Samuel's condemnation makes no attempt to regard any of what Saul said. Samuel leaves immediately after he finishes speaking as if to emphasize the fact that this matter was not subject to further discussion. As Mauchline indicates, the reader feels Saul is getting an unfair sentence in view of the evidence.⁶⁸

In v. 15b the scene returns to the military action initiated by Jonathan in v. 3. Saul's troops are down to 600 men, a realistic and perhaps accurate figure. The Philistines hold the countryside and send out raiding parties, while Saul's forces are concentrated in their stronghold of Geba. Israel is described as weak and defenseless, having no spears or swords (v. 19), and even dependent on the Philistines for the care and sharpening of agricultural tools. This picture of Israel serves to make her upcoming victory a feat of wonder. The suggestion that Israel is without iron arms probably does not correspond to the reality. The Philistines had not completely occupied the country, and would not easily enforce such a policy even if they controlled the land. The author uses an Israel with inferior weapons to emphasize Israel's need for divine help in order to insure victory. The stage is set for the battle.

1 Samuel 14

The battle at the pass of Michmash presents Jonathan as a naive, daring, but faith-filled young soldier whose youthful challenge slays twenty Philistines and initiates a great victory for Israel. Jonathan is openly critical of his father's ban on eating, yet is willing to accept the penalty for breaking it in ignorance. Saul is presented as concerned with religious propriety in calling for the priest, Ahijah, and in declaring the feast. Yet Saul's zeal for justice seems excessive in his condemnation of Jonathan and his willingness to enforce the death penalty on him. The people at first place confidence in Saul and follow his lead, but later refuse to have Jonathan put to death and switch allegiance to Jonathan over Saul in this matter. The closing verses (vv. 47-52) sound like a summary of Saul's reign describing it as one of constant battling.

The seemingly reckless and foolish behavior of Jonathan and his armor bearer still manages to show good military strategy. The enemy is called to them as they stand behind crags that give cover and allow for a surprise attack. They can take the Philistines one by one because it is so steep as to require one to crawl using his hands. It is significant that Jonathan does not tell his father, Saul, what he intends to do. Perhaps Jonathan was already scolded once for starting the battle by killing the prefect. It is interesting to conjecture that Saul now treats Jonathan as he (Saul) had been treated by Samuel.

Jonathan's activity is guided by Yahweh, and the battle itself

is won not by Jonathan's daring nor by the arrival of Saul's army, but by Yahweh who sends the earthquake that puts the Philistines into panic (v. 15) and confusion (v. 20) resulting in the "Lord" delivering Israel that day (v. 23).

Saul's religious concern seems earnest as he calls for the "ark of God" (v. 18) but due to the tumult in the Philistine camp he never gets an answer and instead must attend to the battle. When the battle goes poorly (v. 24), Saul announces the fast and renders "Israel in an emphatic way the war troop of Yahweh."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, though Saul meant well, the fast was in actuality a mistake, serving to weaken the fighting men. Jonathan, unaware of the fast, eats some honey, and the curse goes into effect. Gunn makes the interesting note that it is by chance that Jonathan is absent and ignorant of the fast, and it is by good fortune that the army come upon the abundant honey.⁷⁰ This seems to suggest an element of fate as operative. Jonathan is openly critical of the fast and his father in ordering it. His approach is pragmatic and unfettered with religious scruples. Despite Jonathan's lack of concern for religious scruples, Yahweh has chosen to work through Jonathan in his battle. After sundown the people immediately slay and eat the captured animals, thus breaking ritual law. Saul leaves the battle and builds an altar to make sure proper cult is observed. Saul's priestly role in this context receives no condemnation as it did in chapter 13.

Saul's suggestion to fight all night is still given approval

by the people, but he will check with the ark of God. The oracle is silent (v. 37) and Saul searches out the truth of what has happened. The son, earlier denied the throne by Samuel's condemnation of Saul, is now endangered by his own father. Though the people do spare Jonathan (v. 45), the over all effect is one of "gloomy uncertainty"⁷¹ for the crown prince and for Saul.

The Saul of the Michmash battle narrative is one of either fervent religious zeal or nervous religiosity. His eagerness to do all things according to the law, to seek Yahweh's favor is most evident, yet Saul stops the priest before receiving the oracle, because he feels he must go to battle immediately. Later Saul imposes a fast on the soldiers in hopes of gaining Yahweh's favor. This fast is rejected by Jonathan as a hindrance to the battle. The people in their hunger due to the religious fast want to eat immediately after sundown, and forego ritual law as they eat animals with blood. But Saul leaves the battle to build an altar so that the ritual laws of animal slaughter may be observed. Ahijah, the priest, is not mentioned anywhere in this ritual concern. Saul appears to be acting like Samuel, uncompromising and demanding, and insists that strict compliance with religious concerns be observed. The people and Jonathan seem to be pragmatic, like Saul had been at Gilgal (chapter 13). Gunn feels that in allowing the people's wishes to prevail, and sparing Jonathan's life, Saul becomes himself again.⁷²

McCarter, on the other hand, sees a forecast of gloom in these

events. He states,

[Saul] is not depraved. He is capable of some success as the leader of Yahweh's people. But he is a man abandoned by his god. Indeed he seems ill-fated, for most of what he attempts goes awry. As we have seen . . . his character is flawed by a lack of good judgment and a kind of reckless impetuosity which thwart his own purposes - even the noble ones - again and again. . . . he was rash and presumptuous in his relationship to Yahweh and . . . he tried to manipulate the divine will through ritual formality (14:24; cf. 13:12; 15:15).⁷³

It would seem that Saul wants to do the right thing, but just cannot find out what that is. When he was pragmatic, he was condemned by Samuel; when he tried his best to be religious, he almost kills his son, and is rejected by the people. Yahweh seems no longer to approve of Saul. "The gloomy man, who constantly strives after God's will, is overshadowed by the constant worry whether he is really king by the grace of God . . . Saul is a pious man. But is he the man after God's heart?"⁷⁴

The closing verses 47-52 appear to be an excerpt from the royal annals briefly cataloging Saul's military campaigns which prove Saul a valiant and successful leader expanding his domain. Yahweh had promised in 9:16 that Saul would save Israel from the Philistines and v. 47 seems to confirm it. The Philistine threat returns in v. 52, which suggests that they remain intact throughout Saul's reign, never totally subdued. The promise of Yahweh may have been fulfilled, but it could be reversed, too. So, Saul continues to gather strong and valiant men for his army.

1 Samuel 15

This chapter bears language that belongs to the late source,

yet evidences a reliance on earlier material as well. In the summary of 14:48 a victory over the Amalekites is recorded, suggesting that chapter 15 belongs to a very old tradition. McCarter cites Weiser who regards chapter 15 as older than any of the other anti-monarchy materials.⁷⁵

In this chapter Samuel informs Saul that Yahweh wants the Amalekites put under the ban, totally destroyed, to fulfill Yahweh's promise of their destruction in Ex 17:14. Saul warns the Kenites to move out before the attack and once they are safely out of the way, attacks and defeats the Amalekites. Saul spares Agag, the king, and the people spare the best of the livestock which are taken to Gilgal to sacrifice to Yahweh. Samuel is told by the Lord of Saul's disobedience and that Yahweh "repents" having made Saul king. Saul has failed again, this time resulting in his being rejected as king.

Since both chapters 13 and 15 result in a rejection or condemnation of Saul after he disobeys, many critics consider chapter 13 to be a doublet of chapter 15 which is regarded as the older version. The two chapters are not, however, performing the same function. Chapter 13 accomplishes the rejection of dynastic accession, whereas chapter 15 rejects Saul's right to the throne. These are two different, yet progressive steps in Saul's end and David's rise to the throne.

In v. 1 Samuel speaks as Yahweh's legitimate king-maker giving orders to the king to utterly destroy the Amalekites, all

they have, sparing no one and nothing. Though Saul and his army defeat the Amalekites, Saul spares Agag, the king, and returns with him to Gilgal. The people spare the best of the livestock and all that was good is taken with them to Gilgal to sacrifice to Yahweh. Only what was worthless was destroyed at the Amalekite city.

In the night Samuel is told by Yahweh of Saul's failure and rejection as king. The notion that Yahweh repents having made Saul king corresponds to the notion of God in Gen 6:6 who was sorry he had made man and planned to destroy him in the flood narrative. This is a God who can make mistakes and regret what he has done, who rectifies the situation by eliminating the problem. This God can change his mind, but it is not mere fickleness on his part. God stops the flood because he remembered Noah. The divine silence to Saul causes one to query whether Yahweh remembers Saul, and if so, what does Yahweh recall of him? Perhaps Yahweh remembers David, the neighbor who is better than Saul. God repents having made Saul king. His change of mind is neither whim nor fancy. Yahweh changes his mind because Saul is not a man after Yahweh's heart.

Yahweh's repenting in vv. 11 and 35 is denied by Samuel in v. 29 when he tells the begging Saul that "the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent." Both views are defensible when the use of the denial is viewed as part of Samuel playing the hard and uncompromising spokesman for Yahweh who wants to place the responsibility for rejection squarely on Saul's shoulders with no excuses of divine fickleness. Samuel

is playing hard and uncompromising because in reality he was angry with God and cried all night to the Lord when he first heard of the rejection. Samuel's response shows deep compassion and tenderness for Saul. Samuel appears in that one verse a man of anguish, frustration, disappointment and sadness. He is far more human in the brief appraisal of "crying all night" than his customary role as Yahweh's spokesman allows him to be. It is the Samuel who could cry all night that Saul will want to call back from the dead in chapter 28.

Saul makes no attempt to deceive Samuel about what has been done. The animals are in plain view and in v. 20 Saul admits that he brought Agag back alive. But Saul insists again and again that he has obeyed the commandment of the Lord (vv. 13, 20). The facts of the matter are not in dispute, the interpretation of herem is. Not until v. 24 after Samuel's "to obey is better than sacrifice" speech does Saul admit sinning. He admits transgressing "the commandment of the Lord and your words because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." The notions of herem and holy war are not clearly understood now and so it is difficult to verify whether Saul had indeed sinned, when he still intended to sacrifice and devote to Yahweh all that had been taken, as he expressed in v. 21. No mention is made of what Saul's intentions were in regard to Agag. Saul may have been acting in good faith, but misunderstood how herem was to be fulfilled. Gunn notes that Yahweh and Samuel seem to say that hrm is not compatible with zbh (sacrifice). The sacri-

fice of the spoil at Gilgal will not suffice for Samuel, the damage has already been done. If Saul had sinned in his misunderstanding of herem, had disobeyed, surely the punishment outweighed the offense.⁷⁶

Perhaps the monument of v. 12 can shed some light on Saul's intentions and culpability. Samuel is told that the monument at Carmel was set up by Saul for himself. Such a victory monument would be entirely out of line when fulfilling a divine commission. It would function as a statement of personal triumph which has no place in Yahweh's battles.⁷⁷ But we do not know just what type of monument Saul erected, nor why. It may have been a victory monument, or a religious monument to Yahweh, or for some other purpose. Yet if it was a personal victory monument, Saul suffers more than a slight misunderstanding of herem. He has either not seen the battle as Yahweh's or has actually disobeyed the command knowingly. Saul could be viewed in a very bad light if v. 12 does refer to a victory monument.

Critics who feel Saul attempts to shift the blame to the people and see this as a blatant admission of guilt, fail to notice the repetition of obeying the voice of the people. Samuel is told by Yahweh to obey the voice of the people (8:9; 22; 12:1) and give them a king. Earlier (14:44-46) Saul obeys the voice of the people (the exact phrase is not used) and spares Jonathan's life. Here in chapter 15 Saul first claims to have obeyed the voice of the Lord (v. 20) but realizes after Samuel's response (vv. 22-23) that he has

indeed listened to the people (v. 24) and not the Lord. Saul is not seeking to shift blame, but to explain his circumstances. Saul, the first king, is trying to find his niche in life: should he be pragmatic, religious, daring and forceful in action, give orders, be democratic? Wherever he turns doors close in his face. How does one learn what is the right thing to do? To whom does one listen?

Saul confesses his sin, begs pardon, and asks Samuel to accompany him in worship (v. 25), an offer Samuel flatly refuses (v. 26). The robe tearing is turned by Samuel to serve his own purposes and notify Saul that the kingdom has been torn from him and given to a neighbor who is better. In chapter 13 Saul had heard that Yahweh had chosen his successor, he is now given further information. Yet Saul does not know when he will be removed from the throne, or how.

After Samuel reports that Yahweh will not repent his actions, Saul begs that Samuel at least honor him before the people and return with him to worship Samuel's God, as if Saul had no right to claim Yahweh as his own God. Samuel complies "and Saul worshipped the Lord." (v. 37). It is significant that Samuel does not pray or worship with Saul, he only accompanies him. The Samuel of 12:23 seems to have ceased praying for Saul, he is a lost cause. Saul pleaded for reconciliation and forgiveness, but one wonders if he received either. Samuel departs and does not see Saul again, "until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord repented that he made Saul king over Israel." (v. 35).

Vv. 32-33 serve to conclude the issue of herem as Samuel hews

Agag to pieces. We are never told what Saul's intentions were for Agag, but Agag must have had some reason to think he might be spared because he comes to Samuel "cheerfully" with a suggestion to let by-gones be by-gones. Samuel answers with a most heartfelt sentiment about mothers losing their children by the sword, and then promises Agag's mother the same fate. Samuel's slaughter of Agag may be viewed as the completion of herem, but its placement in the text suggests something else. It is placed between Saul's pleas for pardon and a minimal show of support, and the conclusion of the chapter where Samuel and Saul go their separate ways never to meet again until death. Agag is slaughtered to demonstrate that sins of the past must be punished; Yahweh's judgment will not be revoked. The Amalekites were to be destroyed for their attacks on the Israelites fleeing from Egypt, and Samuel will see that it is done. Saul has sinned and he, too, will not be forgiven, he must suffer the consequences of his rejection of the Lord's voice. It is no accident that Saul gets the silent treatment from Yahweh throughout much of the remaining text. Since he did not listen before, Saul will be deprived of hearing the Lord's voice.

In Gunn's interpretation chapters 12-15 are presented as centered on important judgments. Chapter 8 sets up the question of judging that leads the people to ask for a king who is appointed in chapter 11. In chapter 12 Samuel passes judgment on the people and promises to pray for them to the Lord. Saul has a judgment passed against him in chapter 13 after he offers sacrifice without waiting

for Samuel. Jonathan is condemned in chapter 14 by Saul for breaking a religious fast, but the people "ransom" him. Chapter 15 is the pivotal judgment where the penitent Saul is judged unfit and received no pardon. Gunn's point that the people know how to judge, bending the religious laws in chapter 14, whereas Saul and Samuel do not know how to judge,⁷⁸ misses the mark. Yahweh vindicated Jonathan and that is what the people recognize when they note that Jonathan "has wrought with God this day." His initiation of the battle proves that Yahweh was with him, and if he has accepted Jonathan, who are we to reject him? Yahweh is the judge and he decided that Jonathan should live.

Furthermore, it is Yahweh's judgment that the kingdom be taken from Saul. David will not take it from him; Yahweh gives it to David. Yahweh has judged and accepted the monarchy, but Saul has not met the standard - his heart is not with Yahweh. Rather Saul is busy trying to please others and fails to listen to the heart God gave him (10:9) and listens to the Philistine tumult (14:19), sees the people scatter (13:8), and listened to the voice of the people (15:24).

Saul's rejection was not destined or fated to happen by Yahweh; it was a matter of choice by Saul. Chapter 12 establishes Yahweh's acceptance of monarchy, and as McCarthy has noted, it includes a covenant renewal with blessing and curses. If the people and the king obey and are faithful to Yahweh "it will be well;" but if they "will not hearken to the voice of the Lord, but rebel

against the commandment of the Lord, then the Lord will be against" them (12:15). The curse is open to free choice, but the king and the people will be held accountable for their choices. If Saul had been faithful, he would have kept the favor and cooperation of Samuel and Yahweh. But Saul listened to the people and honored their wishes over those of the Lord's command.⁷⁹ Saul seems religiously reckless in stark contrast to chapter 14 where he is meticulously observing religious rites and correcting the people when they slaughter the animals. Saul's vacillating behavior supports the thesis that Saul was pathetically ill-tuned to the heart of Yahweh. The failure to perform the sacrificial ban against the only enemies of which Yahweh has resolved to "utterly blot out" their remembrance from under the heaven (Ex 17:14), is no trivial matter.⁸⁰ Now Yahweh will be uncompromising and unyielding in his judgment against a Saul whose repentance begs a minimal show of support before the people. To answer Hertzberg's question from chapter 14, Saul is certainly not the man after God's heart.⁸¹ Saul has been stamped with indelible ink as rejected.

Though Saul has been rejected as king in principle, he continues to function in fact as king by popular consent. The chapters that follow demonstrate how Yahweh's rejection is to be implemented as well as Saul's attempts to retain the throne.⁸²

1 Samuel 16

The story of David's secret anointing follows smoothly after chapter 15 where the king has been deposed. Samuel is to stop

grieving over Saul and do the Lord's work in anointing the new king. It is strange to see Samuel in fear (v. 2) of Saul when Samuel has dominated Saul in all their previous encounters. In the preceding argument of chapter 15, Saul openly challenged Samuel, the only one ever to do so. Samuel may well have good reason to fear Saul's reaction to the rejection. In fact, the entire story of the anointing of David sets a tone of suspicion, fear, and potential violence lurking in the air.⁸³ The elders at Bethlehem fear Samuel (v. 4f.); appearances are not to be trusted (v. 7); and secrecy is to be maintained in the very act of anointing (vv. 6-13). Samuel only thinks about the prospective candidates, he does not comment on them aloud. The anointing was apparently passed off as part of the ritual preparations for sacrifice and none of Jesse's family are aware that the Lord's anointed stands in their midst.⁸⁴ Eliab's stature as a qualification for a monarch is reminiscent of Saul's selection based on physical appearance, so the Lord reminds Samuel that God "sees the man" not the outward appearances. God is a searcher of hearts. McCarter cites Mettinger who declares, "Eliab is something of a 'new Saul,' so that in his rejection Saul is denounced in effigy."⁸⁵ Furthermore, the scene bears many affinities to Saul's election by lottery (10:17-27a). Samuel is either using lots or "yes" and "no" answers to consider each son; David like Saul is missing at the climax; and the vocabulary of "choosing" is held in common.⁸⁶

Once the Spirit of the Lord comes upon David it leaves Saul

(vv. 13-14), and the Lord sends Saul an evil spirit. This marks the beginning of the deterioration of the character of Saul. That the evil spirit comes from the Lord is misread by Gunn to imply that Yahweh is a sinister dark force victimizing Saul. Rather it acts as an affirmation that all spirits are subject to the Lord. Such an evil spirit indicated Saul was not himself, but mentally ill. McCarter reports that in ancient times once a person received a divine spirit, he was never free from the influence of spirits again. The vacuum caused by the rejection of Saul is filled with an evil spirit that torments him.⁸⁷ Psychologically the stress and tension of the sin and rejection could surely have had a negative effect on Saul's mental well-being and self-confidence. Yet Hertzberg rightly points out that "Saul's suffering is described theologically, not psychopathetically or psychologically."⁸⁸ It is Yahweh who directs all history, and this seems to be part of the working out of his rejection of Saul. Mauchline contends that "such a doctrine leaves no room for human responsibility."⁸⁹ Mauchline's theory recognizes a sympathy for Saul even in his irrational, violent and jealous bouts, but it neglects to consider the reason why this evil spirit has come, namely Saul's sin and rejection. It is like saying that a drunk is not responsible for his actions, not even for getting himself drunk. Saul's actions caused his rejection and the loss of Yahweh's spirit which is then replaced by an evil spirit. The evil spirit can be controlled as evidenced by the soothing success of David's music. Saul can choose to befriend or harass David, to

tenaciously cling to the throne or abdicate, to accept Yahweh's will or feverishly fight it. Saul's choices are his own; he is culpable for his actions.

The fact that Saul's court attempts to find a cure for his distressed state alerts us to their affection and concern for Saul. David, the musician, is loved by Saul and joined to his court. The evil spirit departs when David plays music that refreshes Saul.

The entire account of vv. 14-23 introduces three themes:

1) Saul is in decline; 2) Yahweh is with David, and 3) Saul loves

David.⁹⁰ The verses act as a microcosm of all that is to come:

Saul delivers himself into the hands of David; David has opportunity to gain status; and Yahweh's spirit promises David a bright future.

1 Samuel 17

The David and Goliath story, although it is considered legendary, does serve to contrast Saul's dismay and fear with David's courage and complete trust in the Lord. David is clearly the military superior to Saul in having saved Israel. Humphreys notes the similarities between the story patterns of chapter 11 and chapter 17. First a challenge is issued by an alien (11:2; 17:23), followed by terror and fear in Israel (11:4; 17:24). After a search (11:3-4; 17:24), a deliverer appears for Israel (11:5-6; 17:25), and succeeds in delivering Israel from the foe (11:7-11; 17:50). The deliverer is recognized and made a leader for Israel (11:15; 17:55-8, 18:5).⁹¹ Both are military war leaders in the pattern of the judges but what is at stake is the throne which Saul will only recognize later. The

spirit of God that moved Saul to spontaneous and daring action resulting in victory in chapter 11, now rests with the anointed David and brings victory through him.

David hears the challenge and ridicule of the Philistine and correctly assesses it as an insult to Saul, Israel, the monarchy and the God of Israel (v. 26). In speaking to Saul, David assures him of his courage and experience in protecting flocks. Saul's common sense attempt to give his armor to David (vv. 38-9) presents a king concerned for the well-being of a youthful and inexperienced lad. It is a humorous picture of the small David trying to wear the large Saul's armor and not being able to walk in it. David faced Goliath armed with a staff, sling, five smooth stones, and the name of the Lord; that is armor enough for David. Saul's way is not David's way. Saul and the army of Israel have proved impotent in the face of Goliath; David, the faithful shepherd servant boy has prevailed in the name of the Lord.

1 Samuel 18

Jonathan loved David "as his own soul" and made a covenant with him sealed by giving David all his clothes. The clothes David accepts from Jonathan foreshadow the kingdom David will ultimately receive willingly given by the hands of Jonathan. David's earlier refusal to take Saul's armor signify that David will not take the kingdom from Saul. Clothes, the robe in particular, are used frequently to symbolize the kingdom⁹² as in Saul's tearing Samuel's skirt (15:27-8) and later David cutting Saul's skirt (24:4ff). In

chapter 18, Jonathan's giving of clothes indicate that his life is bound up with David. His affection and loyalty are centered in David, not in his father, Saul.

Also of interest is the developing emotional ties of those around Saul to David, not only Jonathan, but also Saul's servants. This acceptance of David into the hearts of those closest to Saul adds depth and emotional complexity to the jealousy that develops.

The women's praise of David over Saul, "Saul has slain his thousands, / and David his ten thousands." (v. 7) leads Saul to the conclusion that David seeks the throne and the overtone of suspicion in chapter 16 returns. Now in his jealousy and encumbered with the evil spirit Saul is no longer soothed by the music of David, rather Saul attempts to pin David to the wall with his spear. Saul fears David who has the Lord with him and sends him away to do battle, a demotion from his appointment in 18:5. Yet, David garners greater success for himself.

From now on the negative aspects of Saul come to the fore with increasing frequency. Saul is moved to jealousy, to violence, to attempt to entrap David. Every move Saul makes against David does not harm, but usually helps David so that by v. 16 "all Israel and Judah loved David."

As fulfillment of the promised reward for killing Goliath and as an attempt to have David by another's hand, Saul offers his daughter in marriage to David with the provision that he continue fighting for him. Merab, though, is given in marriage to another.

Critics note that this is probably an alternate account devoid of the entrapment and jealousy themes. The fact that as it now reads the first daughter is not given to David, makes Saul look bad; he has not kept his promise. Later Saul with definite malice offers Michal in marriage. Saul was pleased to hear that Michal loved David thinking she will be good bait to catch David for his own purposes. Actually Michal's love, like that of Jonathan for David will ultimately work against Saul's interests. The 100 Philistine foreskins required by Saul would be a formidable task for anyone but David who returns with twice as many. Saul had not stopped David, but enhanced David's prestige with his family, courtiers and the people of Israel. Saul is the one who has been entrapped -- indebted to David for his music and military service, and tied to him by Jonathan's love and Michal's marriage. Saul's efforts at intrigue and stealth have failed. In the future Jonathan and Michal will each conspire with David against Saul in order to save David's life.

1 Samuel 19

Saul has openly declared his intention to kill David to Jonathan and all his servants. Conspiracy will now be done by others as they attempt to protect David. Saul reveals his desire to kill David, it would seem, in hopes of enlisting the aid of others. Instead Saul's intention will now be thwarted by those who know Saul's mind. Jonathan, caught in the middle, loving David and trying to be loyal to his father, moves closer to total alliance

with David. Jonathan notifies David of Saul's intent to kill him, and devises a plan to intercede for David to Saul, notifying David whether it is safe to return. Jonathan's plea to Saul on behalf of David is accepted by what appears a sane and reasonable Saul. His argument stresses the very thing, though, that Saul has come to fear most, David's success. Yet Saul is reconciled to allow David to live.

It is a short lived peace with Saul's jealousy exacerbated by the evil spirit and David's recent military success. Saul's second attempt on David's life accentuates Saul's illness (vv. 9-10). His plot to ambush David at home with Michal is thwarted by Michal who plans and implements David's escape, complete with a ruse to give him additional time to flee. Michal, too, has betrayed her father and chose loyalty to David. She lies to protect herself, saying David threatened her life. Saul is a man losing the support of his family as they plea, pledge, and plot for David.

Secrecy, conspiracy and escape motifs dominate as long as Saul seeks out David (through chapter 26). Saul follows David to Ramah, but the spirit of God intervenes and instead Saul is seized with the spirit, forgets David, prophesies, and strips himself naked. Whereas the spirit and prophecy affirmed Saul's anointing as nāgiḏ, now prophecy and the spirit protect Saul's replacement. Gunn considers Saul's nakedness as symbolic of his powerlessness in view of the clothes motif.⁹³ Though the prophecy has protected David and made Saul powerless to kill him, it is not a totally negative picture of Saul

prophesying in a bout of insanity from the evil spirit is not a totally negative view. This prophetic trance seems to be like that of the other prophets. The proverb, "Is Saul among the prophets?" does not have the note of disapproval that seems implicit in the proverb's use in 10:9-12, at least according to Mauchline.⁹⁴ The opposing view supported by McCarter and Gunn insists that Saul is not a "beneficiary" but a "sufferer, an invalid" where ecstasy is a "disease" and Saul a "prisoner".⁹⁵ Mauchline may have missed the point; the prophetic trance does not favor Saul or advance his cause, rather it thwarts his intentions and the Lord aids David's escape.

1 Samuel 20

Jonathan is unaware of Saul's most recent attempt on David's life and refuses to believe it. He will, however, do whatever he can to assist David by sounding out Saul at the upcoming feast. When Jonathan finally explains David's absence with the pre-arranged excuse, Saul explodes. He is outraged by Jonathan's aid to David. Saul curses his son as no son of his. Saul is keenly aware that David is a threat not only to himself, but also to Jonathan and any hopes he may have of a dynasty. So long as David lives he is a threat, a threat Saul must eliminate. He cannot fathom Jonathan's allegiance to his potential usurper. Loyalty to David has supplanted the filial loyalty Saul had expected from his children. Jonathan is either incredibly naive or lacks any ambition to take the throne. The entire episode also serves to give David a legitimate reason for

leaving Saul's court. He is not disloyal; he leaves to save his life from an obsessed Saul. Pursuing David becomes truly an obsession to Saul, who clings to the throne not only for himself, but for Jonathan as well. It would seem that Saul has never accepted the judgments handed down to him by Samuel. Saul is fighting more than David; he is fighting the will of Yahweh.

Saul has recognized David as enemy (18:29, 19:27), and strikes out against him wherever he sees him. He is the "son of Jesse", a servant, chosen by the young prince over his own father. Saul's spear is in effect not thrown at Jonathan, but at David whose cause Jonathan has forwarded.⁹⁶ Jonathan has not given first place to his family or even himself, but to David. His attachment to David is in effect a traitorous, subversive activity. Jonathan leaves the table without eating because he grieves for David disgraced by his father. If Saul has disgraced David, he has surely humiliated Jonathan for defending him. Saul's actions have served only to widen the gulf between father and son.

1 Samuel 21

David's flight takes him to Ahimelech, a priest at Nob. Here David secures food, "the bread of Presence", and a sword by deceiving the priest as to his actual situation. Where Saul's attempts at deception have failed in his goal, David's subterfuge meets with success. David has been assisted by Saul's family and now the religious institution. It is significant to note that Ahimelech does not knowingly aid David's escape from Saul. The shadowy figure

of Do'eg, an Edomite servant of Saul, is a precursor of dark days ahead.

David then flees to Achish, the king of Gath, where his military reputation precedes him. The soldiers even refer to him as "the king of the land." (v. 11). David then changes his behavior and feigns madness (v. 13) to accomplish his safe release. Gunn notes that David controls madness, whereas Saul is controlled by madness.⁹⁷ This makes too much perhaps of Saul as a man obsessed.

1 Samuel 22

Vv. 1-5 present David as reunited with his family and seeing to the safekeeping of his parents from any possibility of Saul's attacking them. He also begins to gather a band of disgruntled men around himself.

The account of Saul's slaughter of the priests of Nob (vv. 6-23) makes the first time Saul's hysterical behavior has actually killed anyone. Strangely, Saul kills those who have been most innocent of knowingly abetting David.

Also noteworthy is Saul's accusation of conspiracy leveled against all of his servants (vv. 6-8) which seems extreme paranoia. An Edomite, Do'eg, volunteers information about David at Nob, but leaves out the careful questions asked by Ahimelech. He also adds the giving of an oracle. Whether Ahimelech actually gave an oracle that day to David is difficult to discern from the priest's response, "Is today the first time that I have inquired to God for him?" Ahimelech pleads innocent of any wrong-doing.

Saul's condemnation of Ahimelech and his house comes swiftly and mercilessly. His servants though, refuse to obey Saul's command. Like the people of chapter 14 who refused to kill Jonathan one hopes for a peaceful resolution, but none is to be had. Do'eg is willing to accommodate Saul and single-handedly massacres 85 inhabitants of Nob. Saul, who protected the Kenites, who rescued Jabesh-gilead, now has his own priests killed by a foreigner. The destruction depicted in v. 19 suggests the sacred ban, herem which Saul neglected to impose on the Amalkites. Abiathar, the sole survivor, escapes to David and safety.

Saul has deteriorated to making wild accusations, trusting the word of a foreigner over that of his own priest, and recklessly judging that herem should be exacted against his own religious leaders. Though Saul spared Agag, he would not have spared Abiathar. The one whom Saul would destroy, David promises life and safety. Saul is assuredly depicted as a villain in this account.

The narrative not only depicts David as one who will have the benefit of priestly counsel in contrast to Saul, who will not; it also depicts David as the protector and therefore preserver of the priesthood of Nob in contrast to Saul, who is its destroyer. . . . In the coming episodes we shall see Saul chasing about furiously without priestly guidance -- Yahweh hereafter will refuse to communicate his will to Saul in any acceptable manner (cf. 28:6) -- whereas David, with whom the remnant of Yahweh's priesthood is now living, will be presented to us as a man guided by the divine oracle at every turn.⁹⁸

1 Samuel 23

Verses 1-5 present David as the liberator of Keilah. David is able to receive clarifications on oracles whereas Saul's message

from the divine were more ambiguous, and without clarification. When Saul hears that David is in Keilah, he hurries to arrest him, feeling that David is trapped there (vv. 7-8). The significance of the narrative is found in the role of the oracles. David with Abiathar, the priest, receives divine oracles to guide his every move. Saul thinks "God" has delivered David to him, but with no priest, no oracles, no word from Yahweh, Saul is on a hopeless chase (vv. 13-4).

Jonathan's brief visit with David shows that Jonathan is devoid of any ambitions for the throne. On the contrary, he believes he will be "next to" David in David's kingdom (v. 17). They renew their pledges to each other, part, and never see each other again. When Jonathan dies at Gilboa, he is with his father's forces, not with his friend, David.

Some Ziphites (v. 19) inform Saul of David's hideout, whether out of fear or loyalty we do not know, but Saul considers it a welcome sign of compassion which he has not received from his family, advisors, or God. It proves to be another close call for David, this time foiled by a Philistine raid which calls Saul away (v. 27).

1 Samuel 24

This episode along with chapter 26, work a role reversal where Saul's life is placed in the hand of David who magnanimously spares Saul's life because, as king, he is still Yahweh's anointed one. In each instance, David takes something that proves he was within striking distance and holds an item that symbolizes the kingship, a

piece of Saul's robe and Saul's spear.

While pursuing David in the wilderness of En-gedi, Saul steps into a cave to relieve himself. Unknown to him, David and his men are hiding in the same cave. David is given the golden opportunity to murder Saul, is encouraged to do so by his men, rises and goes to Saul. He cuts off not Saul's head, but his skirt (v. 4). David refuses to raise his hand against the Lord's anointed (v. 6).

In the verbal confrontation that ensues a short time later, David proves his innocence and loyalty. In effect, Saul is put on trial with the Lord called to judge between David and Saul. Saul relents and recognizes David as "more righteous", asks the Lord to reward David and acknowledges the future kingship of David (vv. 17, 19, 20). He asks David to take an oath not to cut off Saul's house (v. 21), which David swears in agreement. They part to go their separate ways.

The verbal parley reveals some interesting insights. David first greets Saul as "My lord, the king!" (v. 8), does obeisance, and bows to acknowledge Saul as the Lord's anointed one, but that is out of respect for the office. It is not the groveling of an inferior to a superior. David launches into his claim of innocence and questions why Saul pursues him. He produces the swatch of material from Saul's skirt and addresses him as "my father" (v. 11). The change in address indicates a change in the relationship. David holds the royal robe; he is heir; he is the adopted, or better has adopted Saul as "father". The cloth evidences that though given the

chance to kill Saul, he has not. David asks the Lord to judge between them, confident that his innocence will be proved.

Saul addresses David saying, "Is this your voice, my son David?" (v. 16). The address of "son" completes the adoption. The question of voice seems silly if they are at close range. It is more a matter of recognizing which David is speaking -- David the musician, the warrior, the servant, the shepherd, the son-in-law, the beloved. Saul proceeds to recognize David as "more righteous". This is not a moral evaluation of character; it is Saul's way of saying "no contest" and settling out of court.⁹⁹ Saul admits he has been wrong and asks that David be blessed. David is acknowledged by Saul as the future king, and is requested to swear that he will not eliminate Saul's line. Hertzberg notes that David's pledge is "of little significance" because it is up to Yahweh to choose the future kings.¹⁰⁰

It is noteworthy that this episode does not serve to reconcile the two totally. They leave as separate people, going their separate paths. David is not invited to return home in safety, and the familial tone of their speech belies the mistrust that is still operative.

1 Samuel 25

Though Saul never enters the script of the David and Abigail story, he is present via the themes of good and evil, violence and status.¹⁰¹ Nabal represents evil or Saul, and Abigail stands for the good in terms of their treatment and dealings with David.

David sends his men to Nabal requesting a payment "whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David." (v. 8). Nabal sees through the polite language and recognizes it as a protection pay-off. He responds with sarcasm, "Who is David? . . . There are many servants nowadays who are breaking forth from their masters." David is no "son"; he is a runaway servant, and is that not also how Saul viewed David? "Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards . . . ?" (22:7).

Abigail and the shepherds realize the potential danger implicit in rejecting David. And in reality violence is brewing as David and his men are arming themselves with swords (25:13). Abigail prepares a generous gift and sets out to intercept David.

David claims that Nabal has returned him "evil for good", a phrase that echoes Saul's acknowledgement of wrong doing against David (24:17). What exact "good" David has done and whether it had been requested are not clearly presented by an impartial party. Exactly what "evil" Nabal has done, outside of refusing to pay David and his men what Nabal does not feel he owes them, is also not clearly stated.

Abigail does obeisance to David, as David had done to Saul at En-gedi. Abigail does not refer to David as "servant", but as "master". She flatters, she offers herself as the guilty one. She asks that his enemies be as Nabal, which in the context of the story would mean "foolish", and ultimately "dead". Gunn sees v. 29 as a foreshadowing of Saul's death where Yahweh will sling out

David's pursuer from the hollow of a sling. Abigail recognizes that David will be nāgîd over Israel and hopes to keep him from any blood guilt, and accordingly she succeeds. Gunn contends that Saul has no one attempt to stop him in his attacks on David or the priests. This view fails to recognize what has been stated before: Jonathan pleads on David's behalf (19:4-6; 20:28-9, 32), the people attempt to dissuade Saul from killing Jonathan (14:45-6) and later the people tacitly refuse to kill the priests at Nob (22:17). Saul has had others attempting to keep him from blood guilt; Saul has not always chosen to listen to them and be swayed by them.

Gunn's analysis continues by noting that Nabal has a "feast like a king" and dies at the hands of Yahweh. Gunn's conclusion that Nabal no more deserved to die than Saul deserved to be rejected as king and abandoned by God, rests on perceiving Nabal like Saul as innocent of any wrong doing that deserved such a severe punishment. He concludes that it is not a matter of morality, but of policy: to rebuff David is to rebuff Yahweh, regardless of the circumstances. Yahweh will strike David's enemies down. Gunn's analysis neglects to note that Saul is rejected before David even appears on the scene. Nabal's death must be viewed as a consequence of not paying David. We do not know whether it actually was a protection racket or a legitimate request to be paid for services rendered. A servant does notify Abigail that David and his men were good to them and rendered valuable service. Given the situation of impending danger, his testimony may be suspect - but it is the only

one we have besides that of David.

Nabal is not "evil", rather is described as rich (v. 2), churlish, ill-behaved (v. 3), ill-natured (v. 17), and foolish (v. 25). Only David accuses Nabal of "evil". Fool may be the better parallel to Saul who declares himself foolish (26:21) and was called foolish by Samuel (13:13). Nabal has been a fool in not treating the future king with respect; Abigail has been politically shrewd, not "good". This would suggest that Saul was guilty of politically insulting David. Saul's rejection is not due to his pursuit of David; Saul pursues David because Saul has been rejected. Gunn has David involved in Saul's rejection, when in fact, he had no part in it.

When Nabal hears what Abigail has done, "his heart died within him" and about ten days later he dies. Surely Yahweh has acted in Nabal's stroke and subsequent death. It has been Yahweh's judgment that Nabal has indeed done wrong against David. David is vindicated not by his own sword, but by patiently waiting and allowing God to take care of things. And that is what David does in terms of Saul, even when he is delivered into his hands in chapters 24 and 26. Gunn's theory of being a victim of Yahweh's wrath due to one's treatment of David seems to hold in the case of Nabal, but not of Saul. But both cases present David as allowing Yahweh to work out his plan, David does not take matters into his own hands.

It is this very concern that Hertzberg and McCarter address.

Through Abigail, the Lord saves David from a great danger different from that in the cave with Saul, but none the less great. It consists, as has been said, in the possibility that David

may take matters into his own hands and thus make himself master of his fate; instead of letting it be guided by the Lord.¹⁰²

McCarter further comments, "This lesson of final reliance on Yahweh, a lesson that poor Saul never really learned, is one fit for a king . . ."¹⁰³ And that ultimately is the theme of chapter 25 for Saul: do not try to be master of your fate, trust in Yahweh. Saul has tenaciously clung to the throne even after it was clear to him that Yahweh was with David, and that David would be king. He has and will again in chapter 26, continue to pursue David in the hope of killing him. Saul has not only rejected the word and command of Yahweh, he has attempted to thwart the will of Yahweh and have the will of Saul reign.

1 Samuel 26

This chapter bears many parallels to chapter 24 where David also spares Saul's life. Culley's study of Hebrew narrative recognizes that the central event in each episode is different, yet he still finds a common outline to be operative in the two episodes. The outline includes: 1) The Ziphites report to Saul where David is located. 2) Saul sets out with 3,000 chosen men. 3) Saul is in a vulnerable situation without knowing it. 4) David's supporters encourage him to kill Saul. 5) David declines on the grounds that it is wrong to harm Yahweh's anointed. 6) David takes something of Saul's without him realizing it. 7) Saul and David are parted. 8) David calls out to Saul in protestation of his innocence. He uses the purloined item to prove he does not intend to kill Saul.

9) Saul admits his wrong-doing. 10) Saul declares David as the future king. 11) David and Saul go their separate ways. Culley indicates that the order is not the same in these two incidents. The order given above is from chapter 26.¹⁰⁴

The two accounts have many identical words and phrases. Along with the common outline, this would lead one to believe that some relationship existed between the two narratives, yet they do not share similar central events, nor are they stock episodes. There may have been a common oral tradition that later developed into two different stories. The two incidents do share a common general purpose, but each contains its own inner purpose which develops in the retelling from chapter 24 to chapter 26.

Chapter 26 presents Saul asleep with his army surrounding him. David and Abishai sneak down to investigate the matter (v. 7). David takes a jug of water and Saul's spear (v. 12). The fact that David orders what is to be taken and then does it himself seems odd.¹⁰⁵ Theologically, if the spear symbolizes Saul's kingly authority, and the jug of water represents life,¹⁰⁶ then it is fitting and proper that David, and he alone, takes these from Saul.

The two exit in safety as the "deep sleep from Yahweh" is still operative upon Saul and his army. David stands at a great distance and calls out to Abner. He humbles Abner for his failure to protect the king (vv. 14-6). Saul recognizes David's voice and addresses him as "my son" (vv. 17, 21, 25), but David responds calling Saul "my lord" or "o, king" (vv. 17, 19, 22). Since Saul has

recognized David as son in both chapter 24 and chapter 26, David is the heir to the throne. He no longer refers to Saul with the warmth of "father", but maintains a respectful distance in his speech. Saul, on the other hand, wants to appease David and therefore addresses him as son.¹⁰⁷

The speeches themselves generally perform the same function as before -- they declare David's innocence, but in a different format. David suggests different reasons why Saul pursues him. "If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; ..." (v. 19). Gunn insists that it is Yahweh who has incited Saul's jealousy and obsession to kill David.¹⁰⁸ The fact of the matter is that the "evil spirit" has not been mentioned since 19:9.

In Saul's first response he calls for David's return with a pledge of safety (v. 21) and Saul openly admits his error. But David does not accept the offer of reconciliation from Saul, and instead asks Saul to send a soldier to pick up his spear. He does not trust Saul. David's speech continues as a self-justification and ignores Saul's attempt at reconciliation and apology. "Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord ..." (v. 24). One would expect "in your sight", but David considers that he still needs the protection of the Lord from Saul. Saul responds with a blessing of David before they part.

The spear, Gunn reminds us, is still in David's possession, thus empowering David with authority. In the report of Saul's death

given in 2 Samuel 1:1-16, Saul is regarded as having his spear (v. 6). The spear is not mentioned in the account of his death in 1 Samuel 31. The Amalekite who reports to David in 2 Samuel does not bring Saul's spear, only his crown and armlet. Whether or not he has Saul's spear, David has already been anointed and has authority. David is a man after Yahweh's heart; Saul used his spear, his authority, his office to try to kill Yahweh's chosen king-elect. Gunn's observation is interesting, but insignificant.

1 Samuel 27, 29, 30

Chapter 28 will be considered separately from these chapters because chapter 28 deals with Saul as the central character, whereas chapters 27, 29, and 30 deal with David as the character. Fearing Saul would kill him, David seeks refuge with the Philistines (27: 1-2). Saul ceases to hunt down David (v. 4). In effect Saul has driven Israel's champion out and into the hands of Israel's sworn enemy. David manages to ally himself to Achish, to fool the Philistines as he actually fights Israel's enemies, and is given the city of Ziklag. What should be an embarrassing element in the history of one of her kings is presented apologetically as the result of Saul's harrassment. David's service to the Philistine's never jeopardizes Israel's interests. In fact David provides spoils for Judah (30:26-31). David's deception of Achish succeeds; Saul's deception of the witch at Endor is short lived. David kills all the Amalekites; Saul spared Agag. David returns with booty, and receives no condemnation; failure to perform herem resulted in Saul's rejec-

tion. Achish thinks David is his "servant"; Saul has learned that David is no man's "servant". David succeeds by means of Yahweh's oracles (30:7-8); Saul gets silence from God and meets his death after a thorough rout by the Philistines. David is spared the difficulty of fighting his own people and raising his hand against Saul, or of revealing his actual loyalty to Achish (29:9-10). David is a man after Yahweh's heart; Saul is not.

1 Samuel 28

The anxious Saul inquires of Yahweh and receives no answer either by dreams, or lots, or prophets (v. 6). Saul knows God has forsaken him. Saul stoops to consulting a medium, a person banished from Israel by his own ruling (v. 3), as an act of religious purging. Later traditions consider this foray in the occult one of Saul's most hideous crimes (1 Chr 10:13). Laws forbidding the use of mediums are recorded in Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; and Deut 18:10-11. The actual account in the Saul narrative (chapter 28) does not moralize or unduly stress the unlawfulness of Saul's activity.

In disguise Saul meets the medium, and requests to speak with the now deceased Samuel. Samuel in death is as rigid and stern as ever. He complains about being disturbed and offers no hope to the distressed Saul who even now does obeisance to Samuel. Samuel repeats the condemnation of Saul for failing to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Saul is told that he will die in battle tomorrow with his sons and Israel will fall to the Philistines (vv. 16-18).

Saul faints in fear and weakness from a fast. The medium is

motherly and sympathetic, insisting that Saul eat something. She prepares him a meal and helps him regain his strength. Gunn maintains that in the eating Saul returns to an acceptance of human life.

Saul eats and accepts life, for food is the most elementary concomitant of life. . . . Deliberately now Saul breaks the fast: he signals for the last time a willingness to sit loose from the constrictions of the sacred world. He becomes again Saul the pragmatist. . . . he faces life, even when he knows this time life holds only death in store for him.¹⁰⁹

Gunn is correct as far as appearances are concerned, but Saul will go to Gilboa and reject life; he will commit suicide.

1 Samuel 31

Saul goes to battle the next day knowing he and his sons will die. We are given no words of tenderness or encouragement from Saul to his sons. It is plainly reported that Jonathan, Abinodab, and Malchishua are slain. Saul seems to be just this once letting Yahweh's will be fulfilled as Yahweh sees fit to do it. Saul is wounded and he fears not for his life, but humiliation and torture from the enemy before he dies. He asks his armor-bearer to kill him. Like the command to kill Jonathan or the priests at Nob, this too is not obeyed "for he feared greatly." Saul then commits suicide.

Suicides in the Old Testament are rare. The account of Saul's death in 2 Samuel 1:1-16 contradicts the suicide claim. The Amalekite soldier claims to have killed Saul at the request of Saul. This version may have been an attempt on the Amalekite's part to gain favor in the eyes of David. Other suicides in the Old Testament include: Ahithophel (2 Sam 17:23), Zimri (1 Kgs 16:18), Samson

(Jdgs 16:28-30). Since there is no established belief in an after-life, eternal destiny is not an issue here. Saul has again rejected Yahweh's will, and instead has taken matters into his own hands. Saul's suicide is not an act of bravery, or courage, or honor. It is an act of desperation and fear. Saul's death extols no elevating value. Saul's suicide signals the pathetic disintegration of a once brave warrior-leader.

As the text presents Saul's death, the battle is not over. Rather when the men of Israel are informed of his death and that of his sons, they fled, thus allowing the Philistine takeover. Not until the next morning do the Philistines discover Saul's body and proceed to strip and mutilate it. The fact that the men of Israel fought up to the time that they learn of Saul's death, suggests that they did not consider the battle lost, until Saul was known to be dead. Then they scatter in fear for they have lost their leader. It would seem to indicate that Saul had loyal followers up to the end. Without him they lacked the courage to continue the battle. His death was a sign to them of their defeat. Leaderless they forsake the cities and hide in the hills.

The men of Jabesh-gilead are able to return the favor of rescue to their liberator, who spared them from the humiliation of Nahash, as they now rescue Saul's body and those of his sons from the Philistines. The bodies are burnt and then buried. Cremation was not as Israelite custom and this is the only instance of an Israelite cremation in the Old Testament. Cremation was later considered one

of the worst punishments one could give a criminal. Hertzberg indicates that the state of the bodies, mutilated and in decay, may have necessitated the burning.¹¹⁰ Driver suggests that saraf, "burnt", should actually read sarap, "anointed with spices", and thus eliminate any problem with cremation entirely.¹¹¹ Hertzberg's explanation is preferable as it does not require a change in the text.

Israel has no king. The episode concludes with an over-riding sense of uncertainty for Israel's future. Saul's story may be over with him as an active participant, but now those around him give dimension to his character. The men of Jabesh-gilead remember Saul as their hero, their liberator. David laments over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1:19-27. Israel's glory has been slain on high places. But posterity, how would they view Saul, their first king? Hero? Villain? God-forsaken and rightly so? A victim of Yahweh's dark evil spirit? A victim of his time and place in history? A sad and pathetic figure? A tragic hero?

Notes

¹Dennis J. McCarthy, "The Inauguration of Monarchy in Israel," Interpretation, Vol. 27, Oct. 1973, p. 406.

²Ibid, p. 407.

³Buckner B. Trawick, The Bible as Literature: The Old Testament and the Apocrypha, (NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1970), p. 96 quoting Alice Parmelee, A Guidebook to the Bible (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 26. William G. Pollard also notes this in his book, The Hebrew Iliad, tr. from Hebrew by Robert H. Pfeiffer, (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 10. He cites R.H. Pfeiffer's Introduction to the Old Testament in which he contends that the author of the early source is the priest, Ahimaaz. Pfeiffer credits Ahimaaz saying he "created history as an art, as a recital of past events dominated by a great idea..." Pollard considers the early source an epic masterpiece, "perhaps the earliest example of a major written epic we possess." p. 9.

⁴P. Kyle McCarter, 1 Samuel, Anchor Bible Series, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1980), p. 173.

⁵Ibid, p. 172.

⁶Ibid, p. 173.

⁷John Mauchline (ed.) 1 and 2 Samuel, New Century Bible, (London: Oliphants-Marshall, Moragan & Scott Ltd., 1971), p. 92.

⁸McCarter, p. 173.

⁹George B. Caird, "1 Samuel, Introduction to Exegesis," in The Interpreter's Bible, George Arthur Buttrick, et al (eds.), Vol. II, (NY: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 923.

¹⁰Mauchline, p. 93.

¹¹S.M. Paul, "1 Samuel 9 7: An Interview Fee," Biblica, Vol. 59, 1978, pp. 542-3.

¹²Ibid, p. 543.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴J. Briggs Curtis, "A Folk Etymology of NĀBĪ'," Vetus Testamentum, Vol. 29, 1979, p. 492.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶McCarter, p. 176.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 177.

¹⁸Hertzberg, pp. 81-2.

¹⁹Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, (NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), p. 60.

²⁰David M. Gunn, The Fate of King Saul, (Sheffield, Eng.: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1980), p. 62.

²¹McCarter, p. 178.

²²Ibid.

²³Hertzberg, p. 82.

²⁴McCarter, p. 178.

²⁵Hertzberg, p. 82.

²⁶Ibid, p. 83.

²⁷McCarter, p. 179.

²⁸Caird, p. 928.

²⁹McCarter, p. 179.

³⁰Ibid, p. 180.

³¹Hertzberg, p. 84.

³²Ibid, p. 85.

³³Mauchline, pp. 97-8; McCarter, p. 181.

³⁴Caird, p. 931.

³⁵McCarter, p. 183.

³⁶Mauchline, p. 99.

³⁷ Caird, p. 933.

³⁸ McCarter, p. 183.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 183-4.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 195.

⁴¹ Hertzberg, p. 88.

⁴² Caird, p. 937.

⁴³ McCarter, p. 196.

⁴⁴ Dennis J. McCarthy, "The Wrath of Yahweh and the Structural Unity of the Deuteronomistic History," in Essays in Old Testament Ethics, James L. Crenshaw and John T. Willis (eds.), (NY: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1974), pp. 100-102.

⁴⁵ Caird, p. 937.

⁴⁶ McCarter, p. 194.

⁴⁷ Mauchline, p. 102.

⁴⁸ Hertzberg, p. 90.

⁴⁹ McCarter, p. 203.

⁵⁰ Hertzberg, p. 93.

⁵¹ Mauchline, pp. 104-5.

⁵² McCarter, p. 206.

⁵³ Dennis J. McCarthy, "The Inauguration of Monarchy in Israel: A Form-Critical Study of 1 Samuel 8-12," Interpretation, Vol. 27, Oct. 1973, pp. 408-12; "Wrath", pp. 102, 107.

⁵⁴ Hertzberg, p. 97.

⁵⁵ Caird, p. 941.

⁵⁶ McCarter, p. 212.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 213.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹Hertzberg, p. 99.

⁶⁰Gunn, p. 58.

⁶¹R. Althann, "1 Sam 13, 1: A Poetic Couplet," Biblica, Vol. 62, 1981, p. 243.

⁶²Ibid, pp. 241-6.

⁶³McCarter, p. 225; Caird, p. 946; Mauchline, p. 112; Hertzberg, p. 102; Gunn, p. 65.

⁶⁴Caird, p. 947.

⁶⁵Mauchline, p. 113.

⁶⁶McCarter, pp. 229-30.

⁶⁷Mauchline, p. 113. Mauchline notes this in saying that Samuel's argument sounds "unconvincing to us." Hertzberg, p. 106. Hertzberg still makes this a matter of weak faith where the situation was the most important factor in Saul's action; he lacks trust and patience. The compiler wants Saul's kingship tainted from the start. Blaike (p. 211) as noted by Gunn (pp. 37-8), carries the lack of faith argument even further saying, "If Saul had had a real conviction that all depended at this moment on his getting God's help...he would not have acted as if Samuel's presence was of no moment...God was not a reality to Saul."

⁶⁸Mauchline, p. 114.

⁶⁹Hertzberg, p. 114.

⁷⁰Gunn, p. 68.

⁷¹McCarter, p. 252.

⁷²Gunn, p. 69.

⁷³McCarter, p. 251.

⁷⁴Hertzberg, p. 118.

⁷⁵McCarter, p. 269 in footnote #1 refers to Weiser's findings.

⁷⁶Gunn, pp. 41-8, 54. Gunn cites Weiser who clarifies h̄rm as giving back to God what is already his by law; and z̄bh refers to man offering something from his own sphere to God. To bring herem things to sacrifice is to confuse the essential meaning of the two acts. Gunn also notes that Hertzberg (p. 127) holds that Saul has contaminated the sacred h̄rm by moving it. Gunn asks whether the sanctuary at Gilgal was a profane place, and whether this is a distinction Saul would know. Gunn concludes that the h̄rm/z̄bh theory is not sufficiently supported by the text. Gunn may be rejecting a theory which aids in the interpretation of the text because he feels this view would possibly cause problems for his own case of Saul as a victim of fate.

⁷⁷Mauchline, p. 123.

⁷⁸Gunn, pp. 73-4.

⁷⁹Gunn, pp. 52-4 suggests that Saul's "fear" of the people could be translated "honor". Saul has honored the people by listening to them rather than honor Yahweh and listen to him. Mauchline, p. 125 offers a different translation of v. 29 rendering it, "the God of Israel will not lie (by giving a wrong judgment) and will not relent (by modifying a harsh judgment)." So it would seem Saul has been judged in the wrong for honoring the people instead of Yahweh.

⁸⁰Walter Zimmerli, The Old Testament and the World, tr. by John J. Scullion, S.J., (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), p. 54. Zimmerli indicates that no other enemy was so threatened with utter destruction. The Amalekite attack on Israel when in flight from Egypt acted as "a rejection of them in the very act of Yahweh's approval...Amalek had made himself an enemy of Yahweh in opposing those coming out of Egypt." Saul's failure to fulfill herem is a failure to be dedicated to Yahweh's battles.

⁸¹Hertzberg (p. 107) stresses that the Amalekite battle was "the best occasion" to theologically resolve that Saul was not "after God's heart." But Saul is not totally evil either. "He is the anointed; he is loved by many, even by his opponent Samuel, he is pious in the extreme, brave yet modest, without a doubt a man of the stuff of which kings are made. But despite his zeal for Yahweh, he appears...more as the king which other nations have than as the instrument of Yahweh..." The question is, why does this man with the makings of a king who is also pious fail? Because he was not "after God's heart." This casts a shadow on the claim of religious piety, unless one views Saul as acting in ignorance.

⁸²Gunn, p. 75.

⁸³Mauchline (pp. 128-9) contends that Samuel fears that Saul will think he is out to start a revolution. Caird (p. 967) suggests that if 15:24-31, a late addition, are disregarded, Samuel and Saul part after a violent argument without any gesture of peace-making, thus justifying Samuel's present fear. Gunn (p. 77) considers the apprehension of Samuel as justified by a strain of ill-tempered violence suggested by Saul's Jabesh-gilead rescue. Gunn fails to note that Saul acts under the spirit of God at that time, and Samuel would have nothing to fear in the present case. Gunn also rightly notes the suspicion of Samuel about Saul and the fear of the elders of Bethlehem over Samuel's arrival as setting the mood for the chapter.

⁸⁴Caird, pp. 967-8; Hertzberg, pp. 137-9. Hertzberg feels that the anointing in front of the crowd would end the secrecy otherwise carefully maintained.

⁸⁵McCarter, p. 277 quoting Mettinger, King and Messiah, p. 175.

⁸⁶Ibid, Mettinger, pp. 176-9.

⁸⁷McCarter, p. 280.

⁸⁸Hertzberg, p. 141.

⁸⁹Mauchline, p. 130.

⁹⁰McCarter, p. 282.

⁹¹W. Lee Humphreys, "The Tragedy of King Saul: A Study of the Structure of 1 Samuel 9-31," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Vol. 6, 1978, p. 23.

⁹²Gunn, p. 80; McCarter, p. 305 citing T.N.D. Mettinger and J. Morgenstern.

⁹³Gunn, p. 83.

⁹⁴Mauchline, pp. 143-4, p. 26.

⁹⁵McCarter, p. 329; Gunn, p. 83. Alter (p. 89) offers an entirely different emphasis. He feels conflicting etiologies are more the issue than the character or theme.

⁹⁶Gunn, pp. 84-5.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 86.

⁹⁸ McCarter, pp. 366-7.

⁹⁹ Caird (p. 1010) explains that "righteous" is a legal word. A judge would pronounce his decision in terms of one litigant as "righteous" and the other wrong.

¹⁰⁰ Hertzberg, p. 198. Gunn (pp. 93-5) contends that David has already cut off Saul's line through his homosexual relationship with Jonathan. David's line has promise because he has married. In this way David has usurped Jonathan's sonship.

¹⁰¹ Gunn, pp. 96-102. The following argument is from Gunn's intriguing theory that Saul is present in the Abigail and David story. Special mention will be made when I do not agree with Gunn's analysis of the narrative.

¹⁰² Hertzberg, p. 204.

¹⁰³ McCarter, p. 401.

¹⁰⁴ Robert C. Culley, Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 52-3.

¹⁰⁵ Hertzberg, p. 210. He attributes this to a tradition which has David perform the mission alone.

¹⁰⁶ Gunn, p. 103.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 103-4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 104.

¹⁰⁹ Gunn, p. 109.

¹¹⁰ Hertzberg, p. 233.

¹¹¹ Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 5, (NY: Macmillan Co., 1971; Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), column 1073, citing S.R. Driver, Zeitschrift für die Alttestament Wissenschaft, Vol. 66, 1954, pp. 314-5.

CHAPTER IV

THE SAUL NARRATIVE AND GREEK TRAGEDY:

POINTS OF CONTACT AND DEPARTURE

Let us first recall the definition of Greek tragedy as an imitation of an act of a certain magnitude, in which the tragic hero, a man of noble stature, great, but not perfect, suffers a change of fortune resulting in his downfall. The downfall is caused by both divine powers and the hero himself. The hero does not wholly deserve the downfall and so arouses pity and fear in the audience. The tragic fall is not a complete loss for the hero comes to a greater awareness, gains knowledge, is bettered, or reconciled. Some gain is made through his suffering. The katharsis exhilarates the audience as they realize an aspect of humanity's greatness. Lesky's classifications of "total tragic conflict" and "tragic situation" will also be considered as part of the working definition. As well, Lattimore's story patterns of hamartia, choice and truth-action have been recognized as a valuable asset in assessing the typical plot lines of Greek tragedy.

When viewing the Saul narrative it is obviously a serious work dealing with serious subject matter. The accounts record Israel's transition from the period of the judges in the monarchy. 1 Samuel 9-31 relate the story of Israel's first king from his selection to his death. The subject matter of the Saul narrative qualifies as

being of some "magnitude".

Saul is described from the very outset as a handsome man of great height, "shoulders upwards he was taller than any of the others." (9:2). So, too, in Greek tragedies the heroes were to be physically of great stature.

A hero, though, was more importantly to be a man of high social stature, a king or warrior-leader. Saul is first introduced as the son of a gibbôr, a wealthy landowner (9:1-2); he is later anointed nāgîd, a prince over Israel (10:1); and Saul is finally acclaimed king by the people (10:24). His successful campaign in the rescue of Jabesh-gilead (11:6-11) establishes Saul as a warrior-leader as well. Saul therefore also fulfills the criterion of high social stature.

Saul's imperfections include his ignorant or foolish disobediences (13:13, 15:17-19), and his jealousy over the popularly acclaimed David (18:7-9). Perhaps one should also consider Saul's spontaneity as an imperfection. Though it can bring him great success as at Jabesh-gilead, it can also wreak near destruction with the fast Jonathan broke, or utter destruction with the priests at Nob. Saul's change of fortune, the rejection of dynastic succession and the rejection of Saul as king by Yahweh, are announced early (13:13-14, 15:26-28), but worked out slowly throughout the remainder of the narrative. Saul's change of fortune, his decline, progresses from occasional bouts of frenzied madness (16:14-16, 18:10-11, 19:9-10), to devious plots against David (18:17-18, 20-22, 25), to

wild accusations (22:7-8, 13), to outright villainous vengeance against innocents (22:17-19). Eventually, the victorious and successful Saul meets his death in an Israelite defeat by the Philistines (31:4).

Greek tragic heroes may be found imperfect as they are stubborn (Antigone), arrogant (Ajax), or irascible (Oedipus). They may find themselves guilty of heinous crimes. Ajax killed the flocks and the shepherds while under a spell; he had intended to kill the Atreidae, the Greek generals and Odysseus. Oedipus discovers he has murdered his father and married his mother. Both Antigone and Ajax commit suicide. So Saul's violence against Yahweh's chosen king-elect, and the priests at Nob, or even himself in his suicide, however horrifying, does not discount Saul as a potential tragic hero in the Greek sense.

Saul's downfall is attributed by some critics to the action of the "evil spirit" from Yahweh, a dark destined fate. Gunn contends:

Good and evil come from God. He makes smooth the path of some; the path of others he strews with obstacles. He has his favorites; he has his victims. The reasons, if reasons exist, lie hidden in the obscurity of God's own being. Saul is one of God's victims.¹

Von Rad agrees in part saying that Saul theologically is

the anointed who slipped from Yahweh's hand . . . Saul as the forsaken, driven from one delusion to the other, desperate, and in the end swallowed up in miserable darkness. . . . However, convinced the story-tellers are of Saul's guilt, still there is at the same time something suprapersonal in the way in which he became guilty - it is the fate which overtakes the one from whom God had turned away.²

Von Rad later backs off from this "fated by God" position. "Of course, Saul was not in the power of a dark destiny, nor had he overreached himself in hybris."³ Von Rad is not comfortable with the notion of God as the dark destiny of Fate, and with good theological reasoning. For if Yahweh has doomed Saul's kingship from the start, then Saul is not responsible for what happened. If anyone is guilty, it would be Yahweh.

But Greek tragedy requires that both the deity and the hero contribute to the hero's downfall. If Yahweh's contribution is the rejection of Saul, then Saul's contribution must be seen in the incident that caused his rejection. Saul shares guilt in his disobedience. Von Rad finds Saul guilty in 1 Samuel 14:24ff, due to the law of collective responsibility.⁴ Perhaps this same notion could apply in chapter 15 where Yahweh rejects Saul. Von Rad clarifies that in the Israelite culture any evil act inevitably had its effects which would destroy both the individual and the community unless the community ostracized the offender from itself. The act was only judged, not its motivations or intentions. More often the law of collective responsibility involved sins of error in judgment or ignorance. Such sins were called "folly." Dramatically, the subjectively innocent sinner was usually a person of high position who unwittingly transgresses.⁵

If Saul is guilty in 1 Samuel 15 under the law of collective responsibility, then the Greek notion of hamartia as an act of ignorance is operative. Saul shares guilt for his rejection because

his disobedience flowed from a personal imperfection, his poor judgment or ignorance in terms of what herem required. The community does not ostracize Saul, so they will share in the consequences, i.e. the Philistine victory over Israel at Gilboa. Yahweh's contribution to Saul's fall is often viewed as the sending of the evil spirit and the failure to communicate to Saul his wishes as the narrative continues. These incidents come after the rejection of Saul. Before Saul's rejection Yahweh has not acted against Saul in any sense of predestined fate. On the contrary, chapter 12 establishes monarchy in terms of covenant blessing or curse as accepted by Yahweh. All is dependent on the people and Saul, not on Yahweh. When Yahweh rejects Saul, that initiates his fall, but it cannot be viewed as the cause that led to the downfall. Surely the absence of divine guidance changes Saul's fortune, but Saul was first to reject the divine guidance given him. He rejected it in his disobedience which stemmed from ignorance, poor judgment, pragmatism, or spontaneity. Yahweh does not function as a dark destiny dooming downfall for Saul from the start. Saul chooses, acts, and is rejected based upon his acts.

This is a point of departure from Greek tragedy. In Greek tragedies a god or gods contribute to the downfall of the hero. Oedipus was cursed by the god Apollo before his birth to kill his father and marry his mother. During the course of the drama, it is predicted that Oedipus will leave Thebes as a blind exile, which is exactly what develops.

Another example of divine intervention into the hero's destiny can be found in Ajax. Ajax has offended the goddess Athene by refusing her aid in battle. When he sets out to kill those who have denied him the honor of receiving Achilles' weapons, she puts a spell on him turning his murderous intent against the flocks and their keepers. When the spell is removed Ajax does not regret his evil intentions; he regrets that he failed. Furthermore, in the attempt he has made a fool of himself, the big brave warrior who kills sheep. His honor doubly fouled, he must act nobly to regain it. Ajax tells his mistress and crew that he is going to bury his sword. Teucer, his half-brother arrives telling them he has heard an oracle that threatens Ajax's life. He must be kept indoors this day. Ajax commits suicide with the sword but curses the Atreidae before he dies. Ajax's destiny has been guided by and predicted through divine action.

Gunn attempts to argue that Saul is similarly destined to doom. He contends that Yahweh and Samuel were angered by the people's request for a king and hold a grudge. A king is granted, but Yahweh and Samuel are quick to find fault with Saul because they want him to fail. Gunn complains that if Yahweh was a God who read people's hearts, he did not read Saul's heart. He contends that "the story of Saul's rejection is the story of Yahweh's repentance."⁶ Saul is a scapegoat, his rejection a resounding "I told you so!" from Yahweh.

In view of McCarthy's judgment that chapter 12 serves as a covenant renewal with monarchy accepted conditionally by Yahweh,

Gunn's theory does not stand. It is not a matter of sin, judgment, punishment, but of sin, judgment, and covenant. Saul is not a victim of fate but of his own choices to reject God's word. In speaking of the Joseph stories Von Rad suggests that

this chain of guilt and suffering has nothing in common with the pessimistic belief in fate found in Greek tragedy, for the story of Joseph distinctively has guidance as its subject. God has . . . used all the dark things in human nature to further his plans . . .⁷

Since David, a man after God's heart, is presented as one guided by divine oracles, and Saul, a man deaf to and bereft of divine guidance, Von Rad's theory may be applied as well to 1 Samuel 9-31. Yahweh's will is not the same as fate, but Yahweh is one who offers guidance which man can accept or reject. Man becomes responsible for his choices, but he is not fated to make the decisions he does choose.

It is hard to judge whether a katharsis of pity and fear has occurred. Perhaps Israel's own history will yield a more objective approach.

Saul is not mentioned much beyond 1 Samuel 9-31. In 2 Samuel 1:1-16 David laments Saul's death, and in 1 Chronicles 10 Saul's death and burial are recorded. The initial response from Jabesh-gilead and David is one of sympathy, honor and compassion. As time passed, the reaction grew to be less sympathetic and more negative in its outlook. The account in 1 Chronicles does not have Saul cremated, perhaps as an attempt to clean up what appears a sticky situation. If Saul was a hero, why allow such a terrible thing to happen to him. In Psalm 78 and Sirach 44ff, Saul is omitted from the

lists of ancestors and deleted from the saving history of Israel. The revisions made on the early source which is generally neutral or positive toward Saul, all tend to diminish the character of Saul.⁸ As Humphreys indicates the later additions shift the emphasis from Saul to either Samuel or David.

The prophetic concerns are voiced by Samuel, and the royalist and Davidic school champions David's perfection. The Northern prophetic circle was interested in a limited monarchy with the king subordinated to the prophet who spoke the word of Yahweh. The initiative for Israel's first king lies with Yahweh (9:15-17, 20-21) so that the search for lost asses becomes a divinely guided journey. The selection of lots (10:17-26) further stresses divine prerogative and diminishes the public elevation to kingship to a renewal of kingship (11:14). The rejection of Saul dynastic succession (chapter 13) is based on a prophet-king conflict, as is also the rejection of Saul in chapter 15. The making and breaking of kings is kept in the hands of prophetic authority (chapter 16). Then the evil spirit of Yahweh controls Saul (18:10-11, 19:8-10). The witch at Endor scene has had prophetic additions expanding Samuel's statement to include a repetition of Saul's offense and rejection. Humphreys does not mention it, but McCarter suggests that the original story may have had an anonymous ghost because the present account has the medium recognize Saul twice: once in the authoritative promise of no harm, and a second time in seeing the ghost of Samuel.⁹ In general the Northern prophetic concerns,

Humphreys contends, transformed Saul into a villain, the rejected of Yahweh.

The Southern royalist circle projects David as the man after Yahweh's heart. Where the prophetic emphasis was on Yahweh's initiative and action, the royalists stressed David as the elect of Yahweh with a special blessing to his dynasty. Samuel fades once David has been anointed never to appear with David again. So, too, does Saul vanish and David has center stage to himself. When Saul does appear in the later material with David, Saul's role is subsumed under David, Saul is a threat to David who is superior to Saul, who is more successful, who has divine aid.

The outwardly powerless David driven by Saul to become a fugitive, outlaw and vassal of Israel's enemy, stands beneath a power that always brings him success. By contrast the apparently powerful Saul (22:6; 23:19-20) is in fact powerless against David . . .¹⁰

Humphreys considers the private thoughts of Saul that transform the positive offer of marriage to Saul's daughter into a dastardly plot against David (18:21a, 25b) as from the Davidic school. The Jonathan relationship is re-focused to legitimize David's claim to the throne. The relationship with Michal also serves to emphasize that David did not abandon Saul; rather he was driven away by Saul's insane and violent jealousy. The royalist revision presented Saul as "the rejected king, the man cursed and set over against the elect David who stands under unconditional blessing."¹¹

Each revision was made without eradicating any of the earlier work. The deuteronomistic historian who reworked huge segments in

other books, has few touches in the Saul narrative, i.e., 12:6-25. His work merely makes explicit material already suggested in the existing context. The traditions overlap such that "images of king, prophet and deity . . . remain in tension with each other."¹²

McCarter's theory of overlapping stages of development does not negate Humphreys' piecemeal approach. In fact, in some ways McCarthy's overlapping of traditions during the different stages of development helps to clarify Humphreys' claims. If these often minor changes in the narratives were to be made, it seems likely to have been a process that developed over time, and was open to the acceptance of existing material, but the traditions felt free to sculpt it to suit their own purposes.

Whether there was an audience reaction of pity and fear in the Israelite audience is not a certainty. What is more assured is that Saul was not so loved and revered a figure that his memory was untouchable. Rather, his was a story of clay to be molded to many different causes. In some of these traditions Saul is given a very negative profile which would seem indicative of a people who were not moved to pity and fear for Saul, but judged him as sinner, a man rejected by Yahweh, and inferior to David.

The reworkings are so extensive that Von Rad concludes that the Saul narrative "has no intrinsic independence" and is never a story told for its own sake, but for the future monarchy under David. He contends that without this future reference that Saul narrative "would assuredly have vanished without a trace."¹³ Katharsis does

not seem to be at work as evidenced in the further Israelite traditions about Saul, or the lack thereof, nor in the reworkings of the early source material.

Greek tragedies usually presented the hero as bettered in some way for his suffering. Oedipus learns that man is a "mere shadow of the gods", and as such should not try to be master of his own fate, but should accept the will of the gods. Oedipus may be blind at the end, but he possesses greater self-knowledge, greater insight on the god-man relationship, and the truth of his identity in the end.

Saul's acknowledgements of his wrong-doing against David and his declaration of David as a future king may serve the betterment purpose. Saul appears to have accepted the will of Yahweh. He gives up his hunt for David. He learns his death is immanent and goes to meet it. Saul commits suicide, not because he fears death at the hands of the Philistines, but he fears the torture and humiliation that would come before it. It seems a noble act to preserve honor, yet what honor or value does Saul have to preserve? He has been rejected by Yahweh; his sons shall not succeed him on the throne which he tried so hard to keep. He has murdered the priests and driven the king-elect into foreign lands. His suicide is another failure to accept God's will in God's way. Saul will die, but as Saul chooses. His death is like a final excommunication, a disintegration of the promise that blazed at Jabesh-gilead, then flickered when he offered sacrifice without Samuel, then paled in

the glow of a brighter light, and finally went out with a whimper.

The rescue and burial rites by the men of Jabesh-gilead are very similar to the Greek play, Ajax. Ajax has had his honor damaged in not being awarded the arms of Achilles. He chooses to regain his honor by killing those men who refused him the honor, the Greek generals and Odysseus. The goddess Athene puts a spell on Ajax so that he kills livestock instead of the men. When Ajax comes out of the spell, he does not regret his wicked plan; he regrets having failed and thus lost further honor. His solution to this dilemma is to commit suicide, for one must either "nobly live, or noble die." After his death, the final third of the play involves an argument on whether Ajax be allowed proper burial. The dispute is settled by Odysseus who sets limits on hatred and ridicule. Ajax had been a great warrior, and as such deserves his due honors. In death, Ajax regains his honor from his enemy.

In the Saul narrative, Saul regains honor and stature that had been his only briefly. The men of Jabesh-gilead see Saul as their personal hero. But Saul is not a hero to all Israel. He is remembered as a hero for one shining moment to one group of people.

In Lesky's categories, the Saul narrative appears to be a "total tragic conflict" since it is the story of one man's suffering and inescapable destruction. It appears to be a "total tragic conflict", but it is not. Saul has not realized the transcendent whole that gives meaning and value to his whole life. He goes to his death knowing he is rejected, but just as ignorant as ever as

to the reason why he was rejected. For if he had known surely he would have let Yahweh's will be fulfilled as Yahweh saw fit for it to happen. In suicide Saul is taking his fate into his own hands just as he had done so many times before: when he offered sacrifice because the men were scattering, or refused to hear the oracle and instead heard the tumult of the Philistines and decided to fight, or when he listened to the voice of the people and returned to Gilgal with Agag and the best of the spoil. In suicide Saul is again acting in reaction to other people, not in response to Yahweh.

But the lack of divine causation of the fall (fate) and the absence of betterment of character exclude the possibility of seeing Saul as a tragic hero in the Greek sense. This is not a total tragic conflict.

The Saul narrative shows elements of hamartia, as an act of ignorance, in Saul's attempt to obey the command of 10:8 in chapter 13 as he awaits Samuel's arrival for the sacrifice. Saul thought he had obeyed the command, but it seems, as Samuel saw things (and Yahweh), Saul did not. Again, Saul can be perceived as acting in ignorance when he fails to properly understand the fulfillment of herem against the Amalekites in chapter 15. Jonathan acts in ignorance in eating the honey when a fast has been ordered, but he is spared by the recognition that in battle Yahweh worked through Jonathan. Saul it appears did not work with Yahweh in his acts of ignorance, but counter to Yahweh's wishes. The quality of hamartia alone does not make a Greek tragedy.

Lattimore's choice story pattern is easily applied to the 1 Samuel 9-31 text. It is a story driven by choices. The people demand a king. Yahweh chooses a king for them. The people then choose a king for themselves. And Saul chooses to offer sacrifice without Samuel because the men are scattering. Saul chooses to spare Agag; he listens to the voice of the people by his own choice. Saul chooses to pursue David, even when his son and daughter interfere, even when his son pleads David's case. Saul chooses to massacre the priests at Nob, even when the people refuse to obey his command. Saul chooses to set a foreigner, Do'eg, to slay Israel's priests. Saul chooses ultimately to die by his own hand. Saul's choices leave him without a dynasty, without a kingship approved by Yahweh, without communication from Yahweh. He is placed in mortal danger at David's hand, isolated from his family and religious institutions, all due to his choice to chase down David. He dies rather than face further humiliation, and is denied the dignity of having his own armor-bearer kill him. The choice pattern gives insight into the chain of events in the Saul narrative, but it does not alone establish the Saul narrative as tragedy.

Of the truth-action plays, the indestructible man pattern bears some similarities to the Saul narrative. Though David has opportunity twice to kill Saul, he will not raise his hand against Yahweh's anointed one. Neither will the armor-bearer kill Saul at Gilboa. Saul is set up as one no human should kill by virtue of his anointing. Saul dies by his own action rather than wait for the

cruelties of the Philistines.

Yet Saul is hardly an indestructible man. In some ways Saul has already been destroyed before his death: Yahweh will not communicate with him; his family has turned against him in favor of David; his orders are not obeyed when the people feel Saul is in the wrong. He has humbled himself before David, apologizing publicly to no avail. He has sought out illegal mediums to hear no saving message. Saul dies in a losing battle that results in the Philistine takeover of much of Israel. Saul is a man destroyed many times over, he just does not die until chapter 13.

To conclude the Saul narrative indeed shows close affinity to Greek tragedy. It is a serious story about a man of noble stature who suffers a change of fortune. Elements of hamartia and character imperfection are present. Saul is a man of greatness in size, position, and deeds. The concept of fate may be applied by some who see Yahweh as predestined to reject Saul from the outset, and uncontrollably cursing him with an evil spirit later. Choice patterns are operative in the narrative.

The fate that determines the story can also be denied if one contends that Yahweh has accepted monarchy in chapter 12, and placed its success in terms of blessing and curse of a covenant renewal. Yahweh is not controlled by fate as were the Greek gods. Yahweh will cause to be what he will cause to be. In chapter 12 Yahweh has chosen to enter a covenant which allows Israel to have a monarchy.

Another departure from Greek tragedy is Saul's lack of

betterment through his suffering. Saul disintegrates. He achieves no ennobling value or sublime knowledge. He never recognizes the whole of the action in which he is involved. He does come to admit sin, but one wonders with what understanding. He does not yeild to Yahweh, but consistently chooses to listen and react to others. The later Israelite community chose not to feel pity and fear for Saul, rather they tried to forget him in their saving history and reshape him in the story into a shadowy figure behind the more powerful personages of Samuel and David. Saul is reinterpreted in a diminished role and often negatively. Saul exits the biblical text not a tragic hero in the Greek sense, but a pathetic, broken, lost and lonely man. It is sad, but it is not Greek tragedy.

Notes

¹Gunn, p. 111.

²Von Rad, pp. 324-5.

³Ibid, p. 325.

⁴Von Rad, p. 325.

⁵Ibid, pp. 266-7.

⁶Gunn, pp. 124-5.

⁷Von Rad, p. 172.

⁸W. Lee Humphreys, "From Tragic Hero to Villain: A Study of the Figure of Saul and the Development of 1 Samuel," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Vol. 22, 1982, p. 102. The argument that follows is further developed in his article, especially pp. 102-111.

⁹McCarter, p. 423.

¹⁰Humphreys, "Hero to Villain," p. 108.

¹¹Ibid, p. 110.

¹²Ibid, p. 111.

¹³Von Rad, pp. 326-7.

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